

OFFICER DECISION FORM

DECISION TO BE TAKEN BY: DIRECTOR OF RESOURCES

KEY DECISION YES

DIRECTORATE: RESOURCES

WARDS AFFECTED: ALL

SUBJECT: HOUSEHOLD SUPPORT FUND

1.0 DECISION:

- 1.1 The Director of Resources has agreed the indicative local allocation of the Household Support Fund as outlined below:

	Initial suggested allocations
Wirral Household Support Fund - small grants programme	600,000
Wirral Family Cook Off project	200,000
Early Years food & essentials hampers (school holidays)	130,000
School Emergency Food Pantries	520,000
Wirral Emergency Financial Support with Welfare Needs Scheme	400,600
Financial support with fuel (Fuelbank Foundation)	150,000
Financial support with fuel (direct debit customers)	200,000
Financial support with energy (fuel) and water bills debt	300,000
Crisis support with emergency heating (Energy Projects Plus)	23,000
Crisis support with white goods (North Birkenhead Development Trust/St Vincent de Paul Society)	51,000
Emergency temporary heating and winter warm packs (Merseyside Fire & Rescue Service)	20,000
Housing Support Costs	100,000
HAF	200,000
Admin 5%	153,468
Totals	3,047,068

- 1.2 A progress report on outcomes achieved will be provided through the relevant Committee following conclusion of the series of Grants.

2.0 REASONS FOR THE DECISION

- 2.1 The Grant will help the Council continue its intensive work, in partnership with local agencies, groups and organisations, to support those most vulnerable throughout the coronavirus pandemic.

3.0 STATEMENT OF COMPLIANCE

- 3.1 The recommendations are made further to legal advice from the Monitoring Officer and the Section 151 Officer has confirmed that they do not incur unlawful expenditure. They are also compliant with equality legislation and an equality analysis and impact assessment has been completed. The recommendations reflect the core principles of good governance set out in the Council's Code of Corporate Governance.
- 3.2 Under the Special Urgency provisions in the Council's Constitution (Part 4, Section 2, paragraph 13 (e)) the Mayor has agreed that the decision can be taken immediately, having not appeared on the Council's Forward Plan of key decisions.

4.0 DECLARATION OF INTEREST

- 4.1 None.

Signed:

Officer: Shaer Halewood

Title: Director of Resources

Date: 15/06/2022

A list of background papers on this issue is held with:

Contact Officer: Michael Fisher

Date: 28/06/22

Date of Publication: 28 June 2022

Date of Expiry of decision re-consideration: 1 July 2022

REPORT TITLE:	HOUSEHOLD SUPPORT FUND (1 APRIL 2022 – 30 SEPTEMBER 2022)
REPORT OF:	HEAD OF REVENUE AND BENEFITS

REPORT SUMMARY

This report outlines proposed indicative spend of a further extension to the government's the Household Support Fund (£3,049,345.09), which is available to support those most in need with the cost of food, energy (heating, cooking, lighting), water bills (including sewerage) and other essentials.

The matter affects all wards within the borough. It is a key decision.

The decision supports the delivery of the Wirral Plan and contributes to the Inclusive Economy priority.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Director of Resources is recommended to:

- 1) agree the indicative local allocation of the Household Support Fund as outlined below:

	Initial suggested allocations
Wirral Household Support Fund - small grants programme	600,000
Wirral Family Cook Off project	200,000
Early Years food & essentials hampers (school holidays)	130,000
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Housing Support Costs	100,000
HAF	200,000
Admin 5%	153,468
Totals	3,047,068

- 2) Provide a progress report on the outcomes achieved to the relevant Committee following conclusion of the series of Grants.

OFFICER DECISION NOTICE SUPPORTING INFORMATION

1.0 REASON FOR RECOMMENDATION

- 1.1 The Grant will help the Council continue its intensive work, in partnership with local agencies, groups and organisations, to support those most vulnerable throughout the coronavirus pandemic.

2.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 2.1 The option to reject the Grant extension has been discounted, as this would mean that funding available to the Council is not utilised to support vulnerable households.
- 2.2 Different financial allocations to the various projects would not have reflected actual capacity to deliver.

3.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 3.1 This report is further to the Officer Decision taken on 26 October 2021 for the allocation of the £3,049,345.09 Household Support Fund Scheme to Wirral by the Department for Work & Pensions (DWP). This Grant covered the period 6 October 2021 – 31 March 2022. The Decision is set out here: [Household Support Fund Decision](#)
- 3.2 On 23 March 2022 the chancellor provided details of a further extension to the Grant; the Household Support Fund, with a further £500m of national support for the period 1 April 2022 to 30 September 2022. £3.047m (£3,047,068.00) is to be made available to Wirral. Similar terms and conditions apply as with the previous iterations of the Grant; however, the ratio of spend between families with children, and families without children/individuals, has also changed – reducing from at least 50% - to now at least 33% of the spend (excluding administration costs) requiring to be spent on families with children; this means that more vulnerable individuals can be supported than with previous versions of the grant.
- 3.3 There are a number of changes in benefits, National Insurance amounts and an increase in living costs that will impact on residents in Wirral; affecting their ability to pay for fuel, food and basic necessities and will increase demand for partners' services.

4.0 PROPOSED INDICATIVE SPEND

- 4.1 The following items of spend are proposed. These figures are indicative and may vary as the various elements are progressed and demand for each established.
- 4.2 **Financial Support with Fuel and with Fuel & Water Debt (Total £673,000)**

Vulnerable residents who are unable to pay for the fuel they need to heat and power their homes or are struggling to deal with fuel and water debt can apply for help in several ways:

- 4.2.1 Those with pre-payment meters can request a fuel voucher (gas and electric) from national charity, Fuelbank Foundation, via their local delivery partners Citizens Advice Wirral, Involve Northwest and Energy Projects Plus, as well as via the Emergency Financial Support Scheme (see below).
- 4.2.2 People who pay by direct debit can apply for help towards their fuel and water costs, which will be paid directly to their utility provider following an assessment and referral by Citizens Advice Wirral.
- 4.2.3 People struggling with fuel and water debt can request help to clear or reduce their debt from Citizens Advice Wirral and Energy Projects Plus.
- 4.2.4 People in crisis situations who are unable to repair or replace broken or obsolete heating and do not qualify for help under other programmes can apply to local charity Energy Projects Plus for help under the Crisis Support with heating scheme.

4.3 Wirral Household Support Fund – small grants programme (£600,000)

- 4.3.1 Community-based food and welfare support groups, including many that played a key role supporting residents through the pandemic, were invited to apply for up to £20,000 (plus up to £2,000 administration costs) to help ensure that food and essential items are available to those most in need in their local communities over the summer months. The application window closed on Friday 27th May 2022 and bids are currently being assessed.
- 4.3.2 Groups engaged with the previous scheme were given advance notice of the Fund in order that they can be prepared to bid. It will be administered by the Local Welfare Assistance Team in Revenues & Benefits Service. Groups/organisations will have until 30 September 2022 to spend the funding and will be subject to the established audit requirements (submission of receipts, etc.), which is consistent with the monitoring of previous small grants programmes.

4.4 Emergency School Food Pantries (£520,000)

- 4.4.1 Primary, secondary, special schools, and Birkenhead Sixth Form College will be given a store of ambient items for the children to take home and use over the summer holiday. The project builds on the success of a similar scheme delivered in partnership with local charity Neo Community, which saw 112 pallet-loads of food delivered to 40 local schools in the autumn of 2021.

4.5 Emergency Financial Support Scheme (£400,600)

- 4.5.1 The scheme allows the Council to provide emergency support to help people in crisis situations due to an emergency or disaster, as well as to helping those leaving care, hospital, or prison to become established in the community. It can contribute towards necessary items and expenses, including essential and specialist food needs, furniture and household goods, white goods, fuel and utilities including phone and broadband bills and some medical expenses. All applications are carefully considered against strict eligibility criteria and evidence of need.

4.6 Great Wirral Family Cook Off project (£200,000)

- 4.6.1 The project will be again co-ordinated by Neo Community on behalf of the Council

- 4.6.2 Up to 4,000 families in all parts of the borough will receive food boxes containing the ingredients and step-by-step menu cards to create interesting and nutritious family meals together this summer. The project builds on the two earlier phases of the Wirral Cook Off, which have seen saw more than 25,000 hampers containing 120,000 family meals, provided to households across Wirral.

4.7 Early Years food & essential hampers during school holidays (£130,000)

- 4.7.1 Targeted support through the provision of food & essentials hampers will be provided to families eligible for 2 Year Funding/Early Years Pupil Premium (pre-cursors to eligibility for Free School Meals when a child starts primary school). Hampers will be provided in nursery/school holidays, namely Summer Holidays 2022.
- 4.7.2 Other local families with children under 5 who may need the same support will be signposted to their nearest Children's Centre to discuss applying.

4.8 Crisis support with white goods (North Birkenhead Development Trust & St Vincent de Paul Society) (£51,000)

- 4.8.1 Throughout the various iterations of the Grant, community-based partners, North Birkenhead Development Trust and St Vincent de Paul Society (Wirral), have provided white goods and other essential items to vulnerable households who do not meet the threshold for Council support through its Financial Support with Welfare Needs Scheme. A further allocation of funding will see this support continue over the coming months.

4.9 Risk reduction items (Merseyside Fire & Rescue Service) (£20,000)

- 4.9.1 Wirral will continue to provide funding that will enable the purchase of a number of risk reduction items by Merseyside Fire & Rescue Service, related to heating etc. for installation in the homes of vulnerable households across Wirral.
- 4.9.2 Neighbouring local authorities are providing the same level of grant to enable a co-ordinated approach across the Liverpool City Region.

4.10 Housing Support Costs (£100,000)

- 4.10.1 The Fund allows for support with housing costs, in exceptional cases of genuine emergency where existing housing support schemes do not meet this exceptional need. Where eligible, ongoing housing support for rent must be provided through the housing cost element of Universal Credit and Housing Benefit rather than the Household Support Fund. In addition, eligibility for Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs) must first be considered before emergency housing support is offered through the Household Support Fund. The Authority must also first consider whether the claimant is at statutory risk of homelessness and therefore owed a duty of support through the Homelessness Prevention Grant. This funding cannot be used to provide housing support on an ongoing basis or to support unsustainable tenancies, or to provide mortgage support. The use of the Fund for this purpose will be administered through the Council's Revenues and Benefits service. Eligibility is expected to be limited based on the criteria stipulated.

4.11 HAF - Edsential (Holiday Activities and Food Support) (£200,000)

4.11.1 The holiday activity and food programme is a national programme that supports benefits related free school meal eligible children during the spring, summer and winter holiday periods. This summer we have over 70 clubs and activity venues running over the summer holidays and the household support fund is funding the food element of the project as each child attending will receive a nutritious meal each day they attend the programme. The HAF project is funded by the Department for Education, managed by Wirral Council and coordinated by Edsential CIC.

4.12 Administration Grant (£152,468)

4.11.1 Wirral Council receive an Administration allowance as part of the grant which equates to 5% of the overall award. This funding will be utilised to provide support for administration and the management of the grant streams.

5.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 The Household Support Fund allocation is £3,047,068.00. This is for the period of 1 April 2022 – 30 September 2022.

5.2 The table below outlines proposed indicative spend.

	Initial suggested allocations
Wirral Household Support Fund - small grants programme	600,000
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5.3 There is no financial risk to the Council if the full Fund is not expended, as the grant payment by the Department for Work & Pensions will be based upon actual spend as detailed by Wirral's final monitoring (MI) return.

6.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1 The spend proposed is consistent with the terms of the Grant.

- 6.2 Any grant funding issued will continue to require adherence to GDPR, health and safety, including social distancing and other COVID-related requirements.

7.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: STAFFING, ICT AND ASSETS

- 7.1 Oversight of the project will be undertaken by the Transactional Services Business Unit Manager, within the structure of the Revenues & Benefits Service.

8.0 RELEVANT RISKS

- 8.1 The proposals have been considered with partners, taking into account factors such as risks, gaps in service, priorities, lead-in times and capacity.
- 8.2 Financial risks have been considered and measures put in place to mitigate against misuse and/or use that is inconsistent with the grant conditions.
- 8.3 There will be frequent dialogue with project leads to limit the likelihood of any underspend (or overspend) at conclusion of the grant period.

9.0 ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION

- 9.1 Through the Local Welfare Assistance Team in conjunction with the previous lead from the Council's Humanitarian Cell, agencies and third sector partners have been engaged in determining both emergency and sustainable approaches to food and other poverty, the impacts of which on households have been compounded by the pandemic.

10.0 EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 Wirral Council has a legal requirement to make sure its policies, and the way it carries out its work, do not discriminate against anyone. An Equality Impact Assessment is a tool to help council services identify steps they can take to ensure equality for anyone who might be affected by a particular policy, decision or activity.
- 10.2 This report has no direct impact for equalities; however, any associated actions may need an equality impact assessment.

11.0 ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 The production of carbon emissions has been limited wherever possible.
- 11.2 Smaller scale projects involving the supply of food will seek to source that locally where practical and cost-effective to do so.
- 11.3 The work of Energy Projects Plus in alignment with the Fund will continue to assist with greater energy efficiency and/or the reduction of carbon emissions for individual households.

12.0 COMMUNITY WEALTH IMPLICATIONS

- 12.1 Distribution of the Emergency Support Fund in conjunction with partners and stakeholders enables the council to support some of the most vulnerable residents across the Wirral.

12.2 Grants have been distributed to organisations based and working across the Liverpool City Region, with payments supporting and contributing to the sustainability of these organisations.

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APPENDICES

None.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Household Support Fund; guidance for local councils: 29 April 2022

Officer Decision Notice - Household Support Fund 26 October 2022

Household Support Fund: – Guidance for County Councils and Unitary Authorities in England.

Officer Decision Report – COVID Local Support Grant - extension No.2 (21 June 2021 – 30 September 2021), 8 July 2021.

COVID Local Support Grant extension: – Guidance for County Councils and Unitary Authorities in England.

Officer Decision Report – COVID Local Support Grant (COVID Winter Grant Scheme – extension), 20 April 2021.

COVID Local Support Grant: – Guidance for County Councils and Unitary Authorities in England, Department for Work & Pensions.

Officer Decision Report – COVID Winter Grant Scheme, 16 March 2021.

Working Group Update: The Provision of Food & Activities for Children in School Holidays During the COVID 19 Pandemic, Children, Young People & Education Committee, 28 January 2021.

Holiday Food and Activities for School and Nursery Age Children During Holidays, Children, Young People & Education Committee, 1 December 2020.

Officer Decision Report – COVID Winter Grant Scheme, 24 November 2020.

The Provision of Food & Activities for Children in School Holidays During the Covid-19 Pandemic, Policy & Resources Committee, 11 November 2020.

COVID Winter Grant Scheme – Guidance for County Councils and Unitary Authorities, Department for Work & Pensions.

SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date
Officer Decision Notice – Household Support Fund	26 October 2021
Officer Decision Report – COVID Local Support Grant – extension No.2 (21 June 2021 – 30 September 2021)	8 July 2021
Officer Decision Report – COVID Local Support Grant (COVID Winter Grant Scheme – extension)	20 April 2021
Officer Decision Report – COVID Winter Grant Scheme	16 March 2021
Children, Young People & Education Committee	28 January 2021
Children, Young People & Education Committee	1 December 2020
Officer Decision Report – COVID Winter Grant Scheme	24 November 2020
Policy & Resources Committee	11 November 2020