

OFFICER DECISION FORM

DECISION TO BE TAKEN BY: ASSISTANT DIRECTOR OF FINANCE
(Deputy Section 151 Officer)

KEY DECISION YES

DIRECTORATE: RESOURCES

WARDS AFFECTED: ALL

SUBJECT: HOUSEHOLD SUPPORT FUND (1 OCTOBER 2022 – 31 MARCH 2023)

1.0 DECISION:

- 1.1 That the Assistant Director of Finance has approved the indicative local allocation of the Household Support Fund as outlined below:

	Indicative allocations (£)
Wirral Household Support Fund - small grants programme (Excl Admin)	600,000
School Emergency Food Pantries	520,000
Early Years food & essentials hampers (school holidays)	130,000
Financial support with fuel (Fuelbank Foundation)	100,000
Financial support with fuel (direct debit customers)	400,000
Crisis support with emergency heating (Energy Projects Plus)	23,000
Crisis support with white goods (North Birkenhead Development Trust/St Vincent de Paul Society)	66,000
Winter Warmer Packs	20,000
HAF (Holiday Activities and Food Support)	70,000
Housing Support Costs	60,000
Admin 5%	99,450
	2,088,450

- 1.2 That a progress report on outcomes achieved be submitted to the Health & Wellbeing Board following conclusion of the series of Grants.

2.0 REASONS FOR THE DECISION

- 2.1 The Grant will enable 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.

4.0 DECLARATION OF INTEREST

4.1 None.

Signed:

Officer: Daniel Kirwan

Title: Assistant Director of Finance

Date: 08/12/2022

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

Contact Officer: Michael Fisher

Date: 08/12/2022

Date of Publication: 08/12/2022

Date of Expiry of Call-In Period: n/a (only applicable to Key Decisions)

REPORT TITLE:	HOUSEHOLD SUPPORT FUND (1 OCTOBER 2022 – 31 MARCH 2023)
REPORT OF:	HEAD OF REVENUES & BENEFITS SERVICE

REPORT SUMMARY

This report outlines proposed indicative spend of a further extension to the government's the Household Support Fund (£3,049,345), 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 report details the spend of £2,088,450 as detailed below.

Wirral Household Support Fund - small grants programme (Excl Admin)	600,000
School Emergency Food Pantries	130,000
Early Years food & essentials hampers (school holidays)	520,000
Financial support with fuel (Fuelbank Foundation)	100,000
Financial support with fuel (direct debit customers)	400,000
Crisis support with emergency heating (Energy Projects Plus)	23,000
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Winter Warmer Packs	20,000
HAF (Holiday Activities and Food Support)	70,000
Housing Support Costs	60,000
Admin 5%	99,450
Total Spend	2,088,450

At its meeting on 9 November 2022, Policy and Resources Committee gave delegated authority to the relevant Director with portfolio to manage the allocation of the Household Support Fund via Officer Decision Notices.

The report contributes to the Wirral Plan 2021-2026 priority of an Inclusive Economy.

The matter affects all wards and is a key decision.

RECOMMENDATIONS (DECISION)

The Assistant Director – Finance is recommended to:

- 1) Agree the indicative local allocation of £2,088,450 of the Household Support Fund as detailed in section 3.4 of the report.
- 2) Present a progress report on outcomes achieved through the Health and Wellbeing Board 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 current economic situation.

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 in addition to the Officer Decision taken on 10 June 2022 for the allocation of the £3,049,345 Household Support Fund Scheme to Wirral by the Department for Work & Pensions (DWP). This Grant covered the period 1 April 2022 – 30 September 2022.

3.2 On 26 May 2022, the Chancellor announced, as part of a number of measures to provide help with global inflationary challenges and the significantly rising cost of living, that the Household Support Fund would be extended from 01 October 2022 to 31 March 2023. £3.049m (£3,049,345 is to be made available to Wirral. The expectation is that the fund should be used to support households in the most need – particularly those who may not be eligible for the other support government has recently made available. The Fund is intended to cover a wide range of low income households in need including families with children of all ages, pensioners, unpaid carers, care leavers, and people with disabilities.

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.

3.4 The indicative local allocation for Winter 2022/23 is as follows:

Wirral Household Support Fund - small grants programme (Excl Admin)	600,000
School Emergency Food Pantries	130,000
Early Years food & essentials hampers (school holidays)	520,000
Financial support with fuel (Fuelbank Foundation)	100,000
Financial support with fuel (direct debit customers)	400,000
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Total Spend	2,088,450

3.5 PROPOSED INDICATIVE SPEND

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.

3.5.1 Financial Support with Fuel and with Fuel & Water Debt (£573,000)

3.5.1.1 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:

3.5.1.2 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).

3.5.1.3 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.

3.5.1.4 People struggling with fuel and water debt can request help to clear or reduce their debt from Citizens Advice Wirral and Energy Projects Plus.

3.5.1.5 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.

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

3.5.2.1 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 winter months. The application window closed on Wednesday 30 November 2022 and bids are currently being assessed. 3.5.2.2 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 31 March 2023 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.

3.5.3 Emergency School Food Pantries (£520,000)

3.5.3.1 Primary, secondary, special schools, leaving care provision and Sixth Form Colleges will be given a store of ambient items for the children to take home and use over the winter period. The project builds on the success of a similar scheme delivered in partnership with local charity Neo Community, which will see over 600 pallets being delivered across Wirral.

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

3.5.4.1 Targeted support through the provision of food & essentials hampers will be provided to families eligible for 2 Year Funding/Early Years Pupil Premium (precursors to eligibility for Free School Meals when a child starts primary school). Across 5 children's centres, supporting with 50 pallets of essentials.

3.5.4.2 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.

3.5.5 Crisis support with white goods (North Birkenhead Development Trust & St Vincent de Paul Society) (£66,000)

3.5.5.1 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.

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

3.5.6.1 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.

3.5.6.2 Neighbouring local authorities are providing the same level of grant to enable a co-ordinated approach across the Liverpool City Region.

3.5.7 Out of School activities - Holiday Activities and Food Support (£70,000)

3.5.7.1 The holiday activity and food programme (HAF) is a national programme that supports benefits related free school meal eligible children during the spring, summer and winter holiday periods. This Winter we have over 43 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. This is a great opportunity to reach thousands of Households during this festive period, and with the pressures on everyone this winter, this will give children a warm, exciting and magical time. The HAF project is funded by the Department for Education, managed by Wirral Council and coordinated by Edsential CIC.

3.5.8 Housing Support Costs (£60,000)

3.5.8.1 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.

3.5.9 Balance left to spend (£960,895)

3.5.9.1 Of this funding, £960,895 is yet to be allocated. The Cost-of-Living Action Group are in the process of evaluating insight and evidence to determine where the allocation of funding would be the most beneficial for residents. In addition, we are awaiting information from the Department for Work and Pensions to allow us to identify residents who only receive Housing Benefit and no other means tested benefits. This information will enable the council to support this group.

4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

4.1 The Household Support Fund allocation is £3,047,069. This is for the period of 1 October 2022 – 31 March 2023.

4.2 The table below outlines proposed indicative spend.

	Indicative allocations (£)
Wirral Household Support Fund - small grants programme (Excl Admin)	600,000
School Emergency Food Pantries	130,000
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Total Spend	2,088,450

4.3 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.

5.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

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

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

6.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: STAFFING, ICT AND ASSETS

6.1 Oversight of the project will be undertaken by the Revenues & Benefits Manager Delivery, within the structure of the Revenues & Benefits Service.

7 RELEVANT RISKS

7.1 The proposals have been considered with partners, taking into account factors such as risks, gaps in service, priorities, lead-in times and capacity.

7.2 Financial risks have been considered and measures put in place to mitigate against misuse and/or use that is inconsistent with the grant conditions.

7.3 There will be frequent dialogue with project leads to limit the likelihood of any underspend (or overspend) at conclusion of the grant period.

8.0 ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION

8.1 Consultation is ongoing with partners as to the response to the significantly rising cost of living as part of the normal and frequent dialogue that takes place. Partners have been working together for some time to determine the impact and the mitigations that are already in place and what additional support can be provided.

8.2 We spoke to local people and the community voluntary and faith sector to understand the challenges they are facing, and the support offer they require. A copy of the full report can be found here <https://www.wirralintelligenceservice.org/state-of-the-borough/cost-of-living-crisis-2022-23/>

9.0 EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

9.1 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.

9.2 This report has no direct impact for equalities; however, any associated actions may need an equality impact assessment.

10.0 ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS

10.1 The production of carbon emissions has been limited wherever possible.

10.2 Smaller scale projects involving the supply of food will seek to source that locally where practical and cost-effective to do so.

10.3 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.

11.0 COMMUNITY WEALTH IMPLICATIONS

11.1 By its nature, the activity identified in this report will take place across Wirral and will be based around the local public sector and community organisations active in the Borough.

REPORT AUTHOR: Michael Fisher
Head of Revenues & Benefits
email: michaelfisher@wirral.gov.uk

APPENDICES

None.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Policy & Resource Committee 9 November 2022

Officer Decision Notice – Household Support Fund 28 June 2022

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

Policy & Resource Committee 10 November 2021

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
Policy & Resources Committee	9 November 2022
Officer Decision Notice – Household Support Fund	28 June 2022
Policy & Resource Committee	10 November 2021
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