

POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 14 June 2023

REPORT TITLE:	HOUSEHOLD SUPPORT FUND
REPORT OF:	DIRECTOR OF FINANCE

REPORT SUMMARY

This report provides a summary of the proposed spend of government's Household Support Fund (£6,098,690) for the period 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024, 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 also provides a summary of the spend of the Household Support Fund (£3,049,356.09) for the period 1 April 2022 to 30 September 2022 and seeks endorsement of the final allocation.

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

RECOMMENDATIONS

Policy and Resources is recommended to:

1. approve the indicative local allocation of the Household Support Fund (April 2023 to March 2024) as outlined below:

Name	Organisation	HSF 4 Proposals
Wirral Household Support Fund - small grants programme	Various organisations	£ 1,300,000.00
Early Years food, bulk school pantries & essentials hampers (school holidays)	Neo Community	£ 1,300,000.00
School Emergency Food Pantries - fresh deliveries	Neo Community	£ 186,000.00
Additional Emergency Financial Support spend	Wirral Council	£ 200,000.00
Financial support with fuel (pre-paid meters)	Wirral Council via Fuel Bank	£ 700,000.00
Financial support with fuel (Energy and water debt) - direct debit customers	Wirral Council referrals from CAB & Energy Project Plus	£ 1,100,000.00
Crisis support with emergency heating	Energy Project Plus	£ 46,000.00
Crisis support with white goods	North Birkenhead Development Trust & St Vincent de Paul Society	£ 160,000.00
Housing Support Costs (Rent)	Wirral Council	£ 100,000.00

Food support for out of school activities	Holiday Activities and Food Support – Edsential CIC	£	150,000.00
Housing Benefit Only Cohort	Wirral Council	£	30,000.00
Care Leavers support - pantries and energy	Wirral Council / Neo Community	£	67,600.00
Older person support / freeing up NHS beds	Age UK	£	100,000.00
Childrens services support for vulnerable families	Wirral Council	£	500,000.00
Administration costs	Wirral Council and Partners	£	150,000.00
Total Award		£	6,093,600.00
Balance		£	6,090.00

2. authorise the Director of Finance to distribute the local allocation of Household Support Fund having regard to indicative local allocation and taking into account the guidance provided by the Department of Work & Pensions (DWP) and the outline plan referred to at paragraphs 3.10 and 3.26 of this report.

3. note the final local allocation of the Household Support Fund (April 2022 to September 2022) as detailed below:

	Initial suggested allocations	Actual spend (incl admin)
Wirral Household Support Fund - small grants programme	£550,000.00	£556,050.89
Wirral Family Cook Off project	£200,000.00	£815,736.35
Early Years food & essentials hampers (school holidays)	£130,000.00	
School Emergency Food Pantries	£520,000.00	
Wirral Emergency Financial Support with Welfare Needs	£250,600.00	£209,217.13
Financial support with fuel (pre-paid meters)	£150,000.00	£47,212.50
Financial support with fuel (direct debit customers)	£200,000.00	£201,232.68
Financial support with energy (fuel) and water bills debt	£300,000.00	£29,676.14
Crisis support with emergency heating	£23,000.00	£23,000.00
Crisis support with white goods	£51,000.00	£51,000.00
Emergency temporary heating and winter warm packs	£20,000.00	£20,000.00
Housing Support Costs	£100,000.00	£17,953.60
Food support for out of school activities	£200,000.00	£200,000.00
65 and over support through various projects	£200,000.00	£901,253.00
Communications	n/a	£4,566.00
Administration costs other	£152,468.00	£2,122.94
Total minus admin	£2,894,600.00	£2,925,222.70
Total cost	£3,047,068.00	£3,049,345.09

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

1.0 REASON FOR RECOMMENDATION

- 1.1 The Grants 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.
- 1.2 Policy & Resources Committee at its meeting on 9 November 2022 agreed that future updates on later allocations of Household Support Fund be provided to the Health and Wellbeing Board to enable oversight of delivery from partners.
- 1.3 Allocation of the Summer 2022 scheme was undertaken by way of an Officer Decision Note due to the short lead in time and duration of the scheme.

2.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 2.1 Revising the delivery method for Household Support Fund is not considered an appropriate course of action given the time constraints and success of previous schemes.
- 2.2 Different financial allocations to the various projects would not have reflected actual capacity to deliver.

3.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 3.1 The Council has been allocated £ 6,098,690 for the latest iteration of the Household Support Fund. The scheme and funding are due to last 12 months. This is a change from the previous 3 schemes which ran for 6 months during either the winter or summer. There are no changes to the requirement that funding must be spent by the end of the period and monies are repaid based on actual expenditure after the event. The Council is required to submit regular Management Information to the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP).
- 3.2 The Council's approach has been held up as an example of how the fund should work, as highlighted in a meeting with the Minister Responsible for the Household Support Fund (HSF), Mims Davies and a small number of councils including Wirral.
- 3.3 Given the previous success of the Council's scheme, there are limited proposals to change the Council's existing approach, beyond recognising that the new scheme will run for a period of 12 months rather than 6 months and adapting the release and use of funds to ensure funding remains available throughout the year.
- 3.4 Any awards made to third parties are done so on the basis that sufficient management information will be provided in a timely manner. This will be ensured by requiring business cases to support any funding Bid to demonstrate how the funding will be utilised. Progress against these business cases is monitored throughout the duration of the scheme by council officers.

- 3.5 The three schemes previously run by the Council have seen funding utilised across a wide section of the community with funds being administered by both the Council and in the main the charitable organisations. These organisations are best placed to reach out to their local communities to offer support.
- 3.6 The Council is also required to have an open channel by which any member of the community can access funds in the event of a crisis. This element supplements the Council's Emergency Support Fund.
- 3.7 Wirral's HSF fund is operated within the Revenues & Benefit Service Emergency Support Fund team, with oversight being provided the Council's Cost of Living Officer Group and the Health and Wellbeing Board.
- 3.8 Each HSF scheme come with a set of guidance issued by the DWP ([Household Support Fund v4](#)), this provides an outline to Councils how the funding can be spent and places limitations on the Council's ability to exclude certain types of spend. This is specifically around not replacing existing Council spend with HSF funding for example replacing Discretionary Housing payments. This guidance also outlines the obligations placed on Councils who accept this funding.
- 3.9 The Council was required to submit its business case to the DWP to secure funding by the 17 May 2023, the bid had to be signed off by the councils Section 151 officer in consultation with the Leader of the Council.
- 3.10 The council is required to collect and report management information monthly to the DWP, this means that any award made to a body or organisation is subject to the requirement to supply of monthly monitoring information.

3.11 Proposed Indicative Spend

- 3.11.1 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.

3.12 Wirral Household Support Fund – small grants programme (£1,300,000)

- 3.12.1 This in the past has included community-based food and welfare support groups, including many that played a key role supporting residents through the pandemic, Applications were accepted 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.
- 3.12.2 It is proposed to hold two rounds of bidding covering the summer and winter periods.
- 3.12.3 Groups engaged with the previous schemes will be given advance notice of the Fund in order that they can be prepared to bid. It will be administered by the Local Emergency Support Team in the Revenues & Benefits Service. Groups / organisations will have until 31 March 2024 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.

3.12.4 A framework document for evaluating BIDs in accordance with the guidelines provided by the DWP will be available.

3.13 Early Years food, essential hampers during school holidays & Emergency School Food Pantries (£1,300,000)

3.13.1 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).

3.13.2 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.

3.13.3 Primary, secondary, special schools, leaving care provision and Sixth Form Colleges will be given a store of ambient items (Items stored at room temperature) 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.

3.14 School Emergency Food Pantries Fresh Food Provision (£186,000)

3.14.1 Working with the Schools Pantries to provide 93 schools with £500 vouchers to allow them to purchase and provide additional items of fresh food to complement the existing offer of dry and long-life goods. These vouchers will be provided in instalments at a cost of £ 46,500 per quarter.

3.15 Emergency Support Fund (£200,000)

3.15.1 Transfer of monies to the council's Emergency Support Fund to allow additional grants to be made. This existing fund administered by the council is accessible to all residents across the borough and provides a wide range of emergency support. Residents are signposted for support in addition to information provide within council publicity relating to cost-of-living support and on the council's website. This a fundamental ask of the government guidance as this scheme available and open to all.

3.16 Financial Support with Fuel and with Fuel & Water Debt (£1,800,000)

3.16.1 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:

3.16.2 Those with pre-payment meters can request a fuel voucher (gas and electric) from national charity, Fuel bank 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).

3.16.3 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.

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

3.16.5 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.

3.17 Energy Projects Plus (£46,000)

3.17.1 Energy projects plus is a capital funding allocation for heating & plumbing appliance repair/replacement for vulnerable. Low-income Wirral residents without recourse to such funding elsewhere, or who would be at a disadvantage if they were required to wait for other schemes to process their application.

3.18 Crisis support with white goods (North Birkenhead Development Trust & St Vincent de Paul Society) (£160,000)

3.18.1 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. This support is available and distributed across the whole of the borough.

3.19 Housing Support Costs (£100,000)

3.19.1 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 must first be considered before emergency housing support is offered through the Household Support Fund. The Council 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.

3.20 Out of School activities - Holiday Activities and Food Support (£150,000)

3.20.1 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. Over the previous summer/winter we had over 43 clubs and activity venues running over the holidays and the household support fund is funding the food element of the project. 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 the school holidays, and with the pressures on everyone's budget, this will give children a warm, exciting and magical time. The

holiday activity and food programme is funded by the Department for Education, managed by the Council, and coordinated by Edsential CIC.

3.21 Support for recipients of Housing Benefit (£30,000)

3.21.1 There is a very small cohort on households who receive Housing Benefit and no other benefits provided by the Department for Work and Pensions. The Household Support Fund guidance explicitly mentions support for this group as they had missed out on the £900 Cost of Living Payments made by central government. Payment of £900 is to be paid via a Post Office Voucher scheme in two instalments June & November to ensure support is provided to those who need it most.

3.22 Care Leavers Food Pantry (£67,600)

3.22.1 Care Leavers Food Pantry is an allocation to the Council's Children's Services to provide funding to enable the food pantry to purchase additional items of fresh food to complement the existing offer of dry and long-life goods.

3.23 Quality of Life Support for Over 65s (£100,000)

3.23.1 Working with Age UK this grant will allow Over 65s to support several projects across Wirral.

3.23.2 Supporting people to enhance their quality of life with specific focus on Nutrition, Maintaining/increasing independence at home, Avoidance of hospital admissions, Prevention of carer breakdown and financial support to carers/vulnerable older people for essential items/bills. This funding aims to support around 800 unique individuals, with those in most need receiving more than one area of support. Individuals will be those already registered with Age UK services, and new people that they encounter at Arrowe Park Hospital, in charity shops and through referrals into services.

3.23.3 Age UK envisage 60% of recipients to be over 65 and that 70% of those supported will have a long-term health condition. Clients from all parts of the Wirral will be supported, but there will be targeted support in Wallasey and Birkenhead.

3.24 Support for Vulnerable Families (£500,000)

3.24.1 Children's services provide significant support that children and families both from our statutory services and from the council's extensive early help offer. Our early help offer is non-statutory and is delivered in partnership with community voluntary and faith organisations across the Wirral.

3.24.2 Children's services receive around 12,000 plus contacts per year from professionals and families with concerns about the welfare of the children in the household. Due to the increased challenges regarding fuel poverty and the cost-of-living and are identifying more of these families in dire financial straits. They are no longer able to afford the basics (food, clothing, gas and electricity). For some they are meeting these costs but then cannot afford another basic need (for example bus fare to school etc). For these families they always look for a long-term solution.

3.24.3 Childrens Services will attempt to help them resolve their financial crisis. However, short term bridging finance is often required, as many of these families have already exhausted funding from other sources. These are cases where there is no other source of funding or help is available. The additional money will be spent in small individual family grants and offered along with the support and advice needed.

3.25 Administration (£150,000)

3.25.1 HSF Scheme guidance allows for a reasonable level of administration costs to be allocated from the funding. The arrangements will be for funding to support the administration of the whole programme including but not wholly dealing with the increased administration costs of operating an increased application-based assistance schemes under the auspices of the Emergency Support Fund and small grants programs.

3.26 HSF Summer 2022 Allocation

3.26.1 Further to the Officer Decision Notice dated 28 June 2022 for the allocation of the £3,049,345.09. Household Support Fund Scheme to the Council, by the Department for Work & Pensions (DWP). This Grant covered the period 1 April 2022 – 30 September 2022.

3.26.2 On 23 March 2022 the Chancellor of the Exchequer provided details of a further extension to the Household Support Fund grant funding, with a further £500m of support to the Council for the period 1 April 2022 to 30 September 2022. Up to a maximum amount of £3.049m (£3,049,345.09) was made available to the Council. Similar terms and conditions applied as with the previous iterations of the Grant; however, the ratio of spend between families with children, and families without children/individuals, had also changed, reducing from at least 50% to at least 33% of the spend (excluding administration costs) requiring to be spent on families with children. This meant that more vulnerable individuals could be supported than with previous versions of the grant.

3.26.3 There were a number of changes in benefits, National Insurance amounts and an increase in living costs that impacted on Wirral residents, affecting their ability to pay for fuel, food and basic necessities and increasing demand for partners' services.

3.26.4 The items of spend shown in the table at Recommendation 3 were proposed. These figures were indicative and varied as the various elements progressed and demand for each established.

4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

4.1 The Household Support Fund has a maximum allocation of £ 6,098,690, spend incurred against this amount will be reimburse in full by the DWP providing conditions with regard the purpose and timeliness of the spend and provision of requisite Management Information are met.

4.2 There is limited financial risk to the Council as we work with partners to ensure funding is spent in accordance with the agreed delivery plans. Plans are monitored and reported on monthly to the DWP.

5.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 The proposed grant distribution profile proposed is consistent with the terms of the Grant funding.

6.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: STAFFING, ICT AND ASSETS

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

7.0 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.

7.4 These risks are similar to previous grant allocations under the Household Support Fund and have been managed and monitored throughout these previous iterations.

8.0 ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION

8.1 Through the Local Welfare Assistance Team in conjunction with the previous lead from the Council's Humanitarian Cell, Cost of Living Officer Group. 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 current economic situation.

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 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.

11.2 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 (2023/24)

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.

TERMS OF REFERENCE

The report is being considered by the Policy & Resources Committee in accordance with section 1.2(b)(i) of its Terms of Reference, to 'provide a co-ordinating role across all other service committees and retain a 'whole-council' view of performance, budget monitoring and risk management, which includes responsibility for a decision: (i) that has a major impact on a number of Council services or on the Council as a whole;

SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date
Officer Decision Notice – Household Support Fund (Oct 22 – March 23) Policy & Resources Committee	8 December 2022 9 November 2022
Officer Decision Notice – Household Support Fund	28 June 2022
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