

Report of	Meeting	Date
Director (Communities) (Introduced by Executive Member (Early Intervention), Executive Member (Resources))	Executive Cabinet	Thursday, 15 June 2023

Household Support Fund - 2023/24 delivery

Is this report confidential?	No
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Is this decision key?	Yes
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Savings or expenditure amounting to greater than £100,000	Significant impact on 2 or more council wards
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Purpose of the Report

1. To agree how the district element of the government's Household Support Fund (HSF4), allocated to Chorley Council by Lancashire County Council, should be allocated to enable it to be issued to those recipients most in need through to 31st March 2024.

Recommendations

2. To allocate the grant amount of £640,000 as per the details within this report.
3. To use the criteria set out in the government guidance published to allocate and administer the grant.
4. To allow any adjustments to the proposed funding allocation to be agreed subsequently via delegated responsibility to the Executive Member of Resources and Executive Member of Early Intervention.

Reasons for recommendations

5. To ensure the funding is allocated to residents who are facing financial pressures throughout winter months until 31st March 2024.

Other options considered and rejected

6. To not allocate the grant funding would mean that those residents that need the support would not receive it.

7. To aim to deliver this funding in isolation of the voluntary sector and other partners would not maximise the support that residents are able to access from this sector.

Executive summary

8. In the Autumn Statement 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 (HSF) would be extended from 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024 with a further £842m of funding.
9. Upper tier authorities are required to work with districts and Third Parties Organisations (TPO), including the VCSE sector to ensure the funds reach those in most need. Provision will focus on working in partnership with community organisations and develop a plan that responds to current issues but also encourages those who are in difficulty to access wider and more impactful support.
10. Lancashire has been awarded £19,356,470 of which Chorley Council have been allocated £640,000. The span for the fund is a full calendar year, where previously funds released have had a scope for spending over 6 months.
11. Guidance for Phase 4 has been sent to Local Authorities with details of type of support and expectations on what local delivery should look to achieve

Corporate priorities

12. The report relates to the following corporate priorities:

Housing where residents can live well	A green and sustainable borough
An enterprising economy with vibrant local centres in urban and rural areas	Healthy, safe, and engaged communities

Background to the report

13. In the Autumn Statement 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 (HSF) would be extended from 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024 with a further £842m of funding.
14. As has been done for previous schemes, the fund will be made available to County Councils and Unitary Authorities in England to support those most in need due to rising cost of living until March 2024.
15. Upper tier authorities are required to work with districts and Third Parties Organisations (TPO), including the VCSE sector to ensure the funds reach those in most need.
16. Lancashire has been awarded £19,356,470 of which Chorley Council have been allocated £640,000. The span for the fund is a full calendar year, where previously funds released have had a scope for spending over 6 months.

17. Lancashire County Council have retained funding to allocate Free School Meal vouchers during Easter, Summer, October, Christmas, and February holiday periods and provide support to other relevant services via this fund such as Senet Under one Roof Scheme.
18. New guidance for Phase 4 has been sent to Local Authorities and in terms of type of support, the expectation is that the HSF extension should be used in a similar way as the previous HSF scheme.
19. The main areas that the guidance would like delivery to focus include,
 - Focus on groups who have not benefitted from any recent cost of living support payments
 - There is no ringfence of any proportion of the funding for any cohort of people/households (within HSF 2 there was targets on families and pensioners)
 - Must operate an element of the scheme on an application process
 - Emphasis on supporting low-income households with cost of energy
 - Provide support with food and wider essentials
 - Support with housing costs in exceptional cases of genuine emergency and where existing housing support schemes do not meet this exceptional need
 - The scheme is clearly advertised and is available throughout the majority of the fund period, either continuously or in regular intervals over the course of the scheme
 - There is no requirement to apply means testing as a way of determining eligibility
 - A resident does not need to be on benefits or unemployed to receive this funding if they can demonstrate need.
 - A resident can access the fund on more than one occasion if necessary
 - This fund is open to people with no recourse to public funds
20. One of the significant changes is that funding can be used for supplementary advice services, including debt and benefit advice. This is now considered eligible spend within the HSF scheme. As the primary focus of this grant is on practical support, expenditure on such services is expected to be limited and linked to the provision of practical support. A recommended maximum is 10% of overall allocation.
21. The fund should look to ensure that unpaid carers and care leavers are aware of support and can easily access the fund this time around.
22. Consideration to be given on how households with non-school aged children (under 4) can be supported

Initial Scoping

23. The Councils Communities team have been working in partnership with community partners to develop a delivery plan that responds to current issues but also encourages those who are in difficulty to access wider and more impactful support.
24. This approach is achieved by directing applicants through community organisations, social prescribing and other health pathways to provide a more holistic approach to resolving issues and encourage the development of skills and social contacts that will increase resilience and wellbeing as well as providing financial support.
25. The Communities team has worked through the Chorley Together network to gain insight and collaboration in how to approach the distribution of the funding.

26. Feedback from delivery partners and those who access the fund confirmed that the delivery partner approach provides greater opportunities for residents in difficulties to receive wider support, alongside the financial support both in the immediate and long term.

Proposed approach

27. This report sets out recommendations for how the funding could be allocated with the objectives of directing the funding towards those in most need and meeting the guidance provided.
28. The fund will help with short-term living costs such as food, energy and essential items. The scheme will also signpost to other sources of advice and assistance.
29. Types of requests which will not be covered by the Household Support Fund are:
- any requests for items that are not essential
 - applications from those with sufficient income or savings
 - requests for support where this is the responsibility of the landlord
 - priority will be given to those who have not been eligible for income related benefits and who have not had any other government cost of living support
30. It is recommended to increase the number of partners delivering the funding to widen the reach and create additional processing and support capacity. As per the initial phase, delivery partners will be able to make direct contact with residents known to their service and known to be in difficulty as well as receiving referrals from other delivery partners, those involved in other support networks such as PIVOT and Social Prescribing and will be able to receive direct referrals from members of the public not known to other services.
31. Data gathered from the previous phases will be used to highlight those who were assessed and in need as well as reaching new applicants who need support.
32. Details of the funding and how to access it will be widely shared with partners and community stakeholders and made available on the Councils website. Officers will work through the school's networks to raise awareness of this funding with families who may not be receiving benefit or support already but are suffering financially.
33. All referrals will go via the most suitable delivery partner and transfer of referral to a more appropriate delivery partner will be conducted if needed utilising an existing platform (Refernet) and associated data sharing agreement of which all delivery partners will have access.
34. The summary of the methods to allocate and distribute the funding is as below. An outline of the full proposed plan for allocation of funding and partners can be viewed in Appendix A.

Energy

35. Citizens Advice will deliver energy support and provide residents with vouchers towards cover cost of energy bills. An initial rate of £200 to £300 will be set as a guide

which residents can apply. In line with the funding criteria, it will prioritise those who have not received other cost of living payments.

36. A staggered approach to distribution of this element of funding will be implemented to ensure we can sufficiently support households over the challenging winter months.
37. A direct payment to identified cohort of households who have non-school aged children and who are in receipt of Council Tax Support. This will provide support towards energy cost.
38. A direct payment to identified cohort of households with pensioners who are in receipt of Council Tax Support or Housing Benefit and guaranteed pension credit. This will provide support towards energy costs.

Food

39. Funding will be provided to our emergency food network partners to sustain delivery of Chorley food clubs/banks to address food poverty within communities and ensure they have sufficient food supplies to support residents for the next 12 months.
40. Communities team will hold a supply of supermarket vouchers supplied through LCC Edenred system which will enable quick support to residents who contact the council in an emergency and provide support within the mobilisation period. These vouchers have been selected as they do not allow the purchase of alcohol, tobacco, or lottery products.
41. Warm welcoming spaces initiative to be sustained where there is a provision of food which vulnerable residents can access along with wider advice on support.

Housing

42. Work closely with our Affordable Warmth Scheme to ensure we can continue to support vulnerable residents with interventions which has a sustainable impact on energy costs, for example, boiler repairs/replacements, fitting draft excluders, glazing improvements.
43. To support those residents that present via the councils discretionary housing payment scheme and ensure that the required needs can be met where existing housing support schemes do not meet this exceptional need.

Essentials linked to energy

44. Selected partner agencies will provide white goods such as fridges to support households alongside provision of smaller electrical essentials such as kettles, toasters.

Other essential items

45. Partners will also be able to utilise the fund to support residents to other living essentials such as clothing, footwear, school uniform, bedding, curtains, carpets.

Advice

46. To utilise HSF monies for our Advice Services core community commission. This would then create a funding resource which can be used on wider cost of living support that is not eligible under HSF criteria and be much more flexible to allocate to changing demands that are being identified throughout the borough
47. All partners are made aware of essential support available across the borough and work closely together to provide signposting to residents which ensures a wider range of support can be given.

Targeted Approach

48. Through our council benefit systems, we can identify those households with non-school aged children who are on low income. Using this data, we can directly target this cohort and make direct payments where required to support with energy costs. This supports these families as school aged children households have access to free school meals and Holiday and Food programme.
49. Through our council benefit systems, we identified a cohort of pensioners in need of support who was receiving guaranteed credit. Utilising this data, it is recommended again to make direct payments. Pensioners have access to all forms of partner delivery, but there is lower take up by pensioners that seek this support. Using the direct payment, it ensures we provide a proportion of funding that targets this cohort.
50. A grant award to Central Lancashire Homestart will be allocated to provide targeted support to families. This will be used to support with food, essential items, clothing, and wider essentials which are identified to help the family.
51. There is a small contingency fund remaining which will be held until mid-way through deliver and then allocated to areas with greatest demand.
52. Consideration will be given how we best ensure that those with disabilities are aware of the fund and help that can be accessed. Utilising our knowledge and existing services such as HIA team and Handyperson scheme we will reach a proportion of disabled people to make aware of the fund and support to access.
53. Work to identify how we should consider providing support to people with caring responsibilities. The fund should look to ensure that unpaid carers and care leavers are aware of support and can easily access.

Grant agreements

54. Of the list of delivery partners grant agreements are already in place for most partners, agreement will be amended to include this additional funding and agreements will be created for those who do not currently have one in place.

Funding control

55. Funding is proposed to be allocated to delivery partners in the form of direct payments and voucher codes which are redeemable by the recipients at major local supermarkets.

56. Delivery partners will record funding issued in line with the management information template provided by DWP. Chorley Council will collate this information and submit this to LCC at prescribed intervals during delivery and final submission at the end of the scheme.
57. Whilst the fund is available to be accessed on more than one occasion, applicants will be asked to declare if they are accessing the scheme through a different delivery partner and sense checks with other delivery partners will be conducted where a delivery partner feels it is appropriate.
58. A maximum value payment of £400 per applicant has been set as an initial guide. Payments above this limit will be assessed via our delivery partner steering group before being approved by Chorley Council.
59. Delivery partners will receive a fee for delivery/administration costs which is available through this fund. The fee received has been agreed in discussion with delivery partners but based on a suggested target of 10% of the overall fund.

Eligibility and evidence

60. As the intention of the fund is intended to reach a wider cohort of vulnerability and is not exclusive to those on benefits, the evidence of need will be controlled by the delivery partner and in line with the guidance, will be appropriate based on a case by case scenario. The risk of applying too many controls in determining eligibility and evidence could result in those in most need not having the ability to access the support.
61. Delivery partners will be required to determine that the resident is a Chorley resident.
62. Guidance material used to deliver the scheme will be provided to delivery partners to help guide them through assessment and checking processes.

Data control

63. Delivery partners will use their own in-house policies and procedures to control data and will be required to maintain the requirements as set out in grant agreement documentation regarding applicable policies.

Information and support in delivering the scheme

64. Communities Team will oversee coordination of funding, support delivery partners and liaise with LCC. They will be the point of contact for complex cases, internal communication, and external enquiries.
65. Guidance documentation outlining the delivery approach and any specific details will be provided to delivery partners.
66. Delivery partners will have access to regular steering group TEAMS sessions to review demands and discuss feedback from casework. Any additional pathways or processes needed will be devised jointly with the Council and the delivery partner group.

Monitoring

67. Delivery partners will be expected to record data in accordance with the requirement of the funding and provide this to the Council to collate and report to the DWP via LCC.
68. Delivery partners will also record wider data to help gather insight on the root causes of the resident's difficulties.
69. We also aim to conduct follow up contact on a sample of the recipients to understand the impact of the funding.

Linking to other workstreams

70. This delivery proposal will link the support provided by the delivery partners to several other existing and emerging workstreams and existing early intervention and support pathways within the Council and other external partners.
71. This will ensure support options are maximised in an efficient way and demonstrates the ambition to co-deliver community impact projects directly with community partners.

Climate change and air quality

72. The work noted in this report does not impact on the Councils Carbon emissions and the wider Climate Emergency and sustainability targets of the Council.

Equality and diversity

73. The programme will be open to all Chorley residents who are eligible using the criteria provided by central government with a targeted approach to ensure all household make up can access support such as families, adult only, pensioners.
74. An Impact Assessment will be completed prior to starting delivery.

Risk

75. Risk associated with this funding is the ability to ensure the funding is allocated prior to the 31st March 2024 to ensure all the funding is used to support those in need.
76. However, if there is significant demand there is the risk that not all applicants will be supported. Therefore, it will be communicated that the scheme will operate on a first come, first served basis until no more fund remain. This would be only be for energy support payments, most food related support will still be able to be accessed due to working with sustainable organisations.
77. Risk that external partners may have capacity issues and struggle to cope with demand/levels of outputs. Risk will be minimised as all partners for delivery have been scoped accordingly through previous working relationships and risks identified through appropriate policies and procedures. Regular contact will be maintained to manage issues and performance

Comments of the Statutory Finance Officer

78. There are no direct financial implications of this report. The Household Support Fund Phase 4 (HSF4) allocation to Chorley Council of £640,000 will be used to administer the grant based on the specific criteria set out in the government guidance. The funding must be spent by 31st March 2024 or returned to Lancashire County Council and ultimately the government.

Comments of the Monitoring Officer

79. Any amendment to existing grant agreements with partner organisations will need to be agreed by both parties in writing. The funds should be distributed in accordance with the best value duty.
80. Use of personal data must accord with the Data Protection Act 2018. Regard should be had to privacy notices and the stated purposes of processing relevant to the personal data used.

Background documents

There are no background papers to this report

Appendices

Appendix A: Household Support Fund 2023/24 Delivery - Breakdown of Funding

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This decision will come into force and may be implemented five working days after its publication date, subject to being called in in accordance with the Council's Constitution.