

Report of	Meeting	Date
Director (Communities) (Introduced by Executive Member (Early Intervention), Executive Member (Resources))	Executive Cabinet	Thursday, 10 November

Household Support Fund - Phase 3 Delivery Plan

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

- To agree how the district element of the government's Household Support Fund Phase 3 (HSF3), 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 2023.

Recommendations

- To allocate the grant amount of £320,000 as per the details within this report.
- To use the specific criteria set out in the government guidance published to allocate and administer the grant.
- To allow any adjustments to the proposed funding allocation to be agreed subsequently via delegated responsibility to the Executive Member of Resources.

Reasons for recommendations

- To ensure the funding is allocated to residents who are facing financial pressures throughout winter months until 31st March 2023.

Other options considered and rejected

- To not allocate the grant funding would mean that those residents that need the support would not receive it.
- 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 August, the government announced an extension to the Household Support Fund with a fund of £500million made available to County Councils and Unitary Authorities in England to support those most in need due to rising cost of living until March 2023.
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.
10. Lancashire has been awarded £9,678,235.22 of which Chorley Council have been allocated £320,000.
11. Guidance for Phase 3 has been sent to Local Authorities with details of type of support and expectations on what local delivery should look to achieve.
12. Local provision will focus on working in partnership with community organisations and develop a delivery plan that responds to current issues but also encourages those who are in difficulty to access wider and more impactful support.

Corporate priorities

13. The report relates to the following corporate priorities:

Involving residents in improving their local area and equality of access for all	A strong local economy
Clean, safe and healthy communities	An ambitious council that does more to meet the needs of residents and the local area

Background to the report

14. The government announced an extension to the Household Support Fund with a fund of £500million made available to County Councils and Unitary Authorities in England to support those most in need due to rising cost of living until March 2023. 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.
15. Lancashire has been awarded £9,678,235.22 of which Chorley Council have been allocated £320,000. Lancashire County Council have retained funding to allocate Free School Meal vouchers during October, Christmas and February holiday periods and provide support to other relevant services via this fund.
16. Guidance for Phase 3 has been sent to Local Authorities with details of type of support and expectations which local delivery should look to achieve.
17. New guidance for Phase 3 has been sent to Local Authorities and in terms of type of support, authorities are encouraged to adopt similar principles as in previous HSF delivery in administering this grant.
18. 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
- No ringfence of any proportion of the funding for any cohort of people/households (within HSF 2 there were 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, use discretion on how to identify and support those most in need, considering a wide range of information
- Use the funding by the 31st March to meet immediate needs and help those who are struggling.
- 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

Proposed approach

19. 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.
20. The Communities team has worked through the Chorley Together network to gain insight and collaboration in how to approach the distribution of the third phase of funding. 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.
21. 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.
22. Appendix A details the proposed breakdown and allocation of the funding across the recommended categories and delivery partners.
23. 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.
24. 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.

25. Data gathered from the previous phases will be used to highlight those who were assessed as in need, as well as reaching new applicants who need support.
26. Details of the funding and how to access it will be widely shared with partners and community stakeholders and made available on the council's website.
27. 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.
28. Through our council benefit systems, we can identify those who are on benefits/low income but have not triggered other cost of living payments. Using this data, it is recommended we make direct payments to support with energy costs.
29. Within Phase 2, we identified a cohort of pensioners in need of support who were receiving guaranteed credit. Utilising this data, it is recommended again to make £60 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.
30. There is a small contingency fund remaining which will be held until mid-way through deliver and then allocated to areas with greatest demand.
31. The summary of the methods to allocate and distribute the funding is as follows:
 - A direct payment to identified pensioners in receipt of pension payment and receiving one passported benefit, for support towards energy costs.
 - A direct payment to those identified are on low income but not triggered other cost of living support payments for support towards energy costs
 - A grant award to Citizens Advice to administer energy support payments
 - A grant award to several delivery partners from the VCFSE sector to administer payments for food and essentials along with providing wider support
 - A grant award to Central Lancashire Homestart to support families
 - Supplementing food banks and an existing community-based voucher scheme
 - Retaining a proportion for Chorley Council to allocate whilst the scheme is mobilising and to support general delivery
 - Allocation of funding to cover delivery / administration costs
 - Retaining a contingency to allocate mid-way through the delivery period to increase areas where demand is higher

Grant agreements

32. 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

33. 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.

34. 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.
35. 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.
36. A maximum value payment of £300 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.
37. 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 4% of the overall fund.

Eligibility and evidence

38. 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.
39. Delivery partners will be required to determine that the resident is a Chorley resident.
40. Guidance material used to deliver the scheme will be provided to delivery partners to help guide them through assessment and checking processes.

Data control

41. 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

42. 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.
43. Guidance documentation outlining the delivery approach and any specific details will be provided to delivery partners.
44. 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

45. 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.

46. Delivery partners will also record wider data to help gather insight on the root causes of the resident's difficulties.
47. 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

48. 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.
49. 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

50. The work noted in this report does not impact the climate change and sustainability targets of the Councils Green Agenda and all environmental considerations are in place.

Equality and diversity

51. 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 households can access support such as families, adult only, pensioners

Risk

52. Risk associated with this funding is the ability to ensure the funding is allocated prior to the 31st March to ensure all the funding is used to support those in need.
53. Risk that external partners may have capacity issues and struggle to cope with demand/levels of outputs, but 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

54. This funding must be spent by 31st March 2023 or returned to Lancashire County Council and ultimately the Government. This leaves approximately 4 months to distribute funds to eligible residents.
55. Spend levels will be closely monitored to ensure funds are used to the best effect, and fully spent by 31st March 2023.
56. A partnership approach has been developed which will see existing partners utilising their established networks to distribute funds. A number of safeguards are in place;
 - a. Vouchers will be digital and have system generated reference numbers to avoid misuse.
 - b. Activity will be recorded on the Refernet system to mitigate the risk of duplicate applications to different Partners.

57. There are no wider budget / resource implications for the Council.

Comments of the Monitoring Officer

58. Clearly it is imperative that the council allocates the grant monies expeditiously and in accordance with relevant Government guidance. Working through and with our partners clearly makes great sense in this regard. Grant agreements will be amended as necessary and all partners will need to comply with their own data control procedures. There are no legal concerns with what is proposed

Background documents

Household Support Fund - <http://mod/mglIssueHistoryHome.aspx?IId=92910&optionId=0>

Household Support Fund Extension 2022 -

<http://mod/mglIssueHistoryHome.aspx?IId=97984&optionId=0>

Appendices

Appendix A: Household Support Fund Phase 3 - Breakdown of Funding

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