

Report subject	Acceptance and allocation of the Household Support Fund
Meeting date	27 October 2021
Status	Public Report
Executive summary	<p>The purpose of this report is to seek approval for BCP Council to accept the £2,653,367.04 allocated by the Department for Work and Pensions under the Household Support Fund (HSF) and to approve the outlined approach for administering the funding.</p> <p>At least 50% of the total funding must be spent on families with children. The expectation is that the HSF should primarily be used to support households in the most need with food, energy and water bills. It can also be used to support households with essential costs related to those items and with wider essential costs.</p> <p>There is an expectation that Councils begin providing support from the 6 October 2021 until the 31 March 2022.</p>
Recommendations	<p>It is RECOMMENDED that:</p> <p>(a) Cabinet recommend that Council approve the proposed BCP wide approach to meeting the requirements of the Household Support Fund to be delivered by the Council working in partnership with partner organisations.</p> <p>(b) Cabinet recommend that Council approve the funding proposals detailed within the report and the summary financial implications section of the Cabinet Report (section 25).</p>
Reason for recommendations	To establish a co-ordinated, BCP wide approach to ensuring vulnerable groups are able to access the support they need to address food and energy poverty over the winter period in line with the aims of the Household Support Fund and the Council's Financial Regulations for accepting funding.

Portfolio Holder(s):	Cllr Nicola Greene, Portfolio Holder for Covid Resilience, Schools and Skills
Corporate Director	Kate Ryan, Chief Operations Officer
Report Authors	Cat McMillan, Head of Community Engagement
Wards	Council-wide
Classification	For Decision

Background

The purpose of the Household Support Fund

1. In October 2021, the Government announced that a new Household Support Fund (HSF) grant will be made available to County Councils and Unitary Authorities in England to support those most in need this winter. This new grant will run from 6 October 2021 to 31 March 2022 and totals £500m nationwide.
2. At least 50% of the total funding must be spent on families with children. In terms of type of support, the expectation is that the HSF should primarily be used to support households in the most need with food, energy and water bills. It can also be used to support households with essential costs related to those items and with wider essential costs. BCP Council have been allocated £2,653,367.04.
3. The Fund will allow councils to directly help the hardest-hit families and individuals, administering the scheme and providing direct assistance to vulnerable households, and families with children particularly affected by the pandemic including providing food for children who need it over the holidays. This will include families who normally have access to Free School Meals during term time and children in receipt of a funded 2-year-old place.
4. Authorities have flexibility in administering the funding within the confines of the scheme – which may include direct cash payments (preferably using vouchers), the provision of food – giving meals to those in need or boosting funding for organisations already doing so, or funding through third party organisations. Authorities may use some of their total allocation towards administration costs.
5. Schools will continue providing meals for disadvantaged children during term-time. We will need to provide data to the Department of Work and Pensions on the administration of the grant relating to:
 - a. Families with children- how many families and how much
 - b. Families without children – how many and how much
 - c. Other

6. The fund is not to be means tested – the authority is to use a targeted approach. We can allocate funds to other organisations e.g., schools and food banks, but data will need to be collected as above.

Preventing food hunger

7. Planning has begun to ensure that resources are targeted effectively to ensure that children in BCP have access to food /meals during school holidays. We will work with schools to identify the children and families who need food support – focusing on those who receive free school meals but also looking to work holistically to identify both families that would benefit by having access to this scheme. We anticipate that not all families who are offered support will take it, only those who identify themselves as needing support.
8. School meals will be available at schools during term times so vouchers will only be offered through this scheme during the October, December, February and April school holidays. The scheme will however be flexible enough to provide support as and when required where a need is identified.

Flexible voucher scheme – October 2021 – 31 March 2022

9. Our proposed option is to provide families with food vouchers that can be redeemed in supermarkets and that we will work with the voucher provider that we have been using since December 2020. The value of the voucher for a family with children will be £30 per week, per child. Flexibility will be available to support family's needs with different levels of funding where this is required.
10. The voucher scheme will be open to referrals from the wider community support network for targeted families without children and other individuals when a voucher would be the right response. The cost of the voucher for the local authority will be the same as the face value of the voucher to be redeemed by the family. Any vouchers assigned but not taken up by the families can be reassigned
11. Corporate Management Board approved an Officer Decision Record on the 19 October 2021 for the provision of vouchers for the October half term holidays due to the need for schools, children's services and education settings to implement the voucher scheme prior to the 22 October 2021, when schools break up for the half term holidays.

Criteria

12. For a family to be offered a voucher via schools' and educational settings, children will need to be in receipt of free school meals or children that the school identifies as being vulnerable. For any other family to qualify for a voucher the following criteria will be applied
 - Living in Bournemouth, Christchurch or Poole
 - Currently in receipt of 2-year-old childcare funding
 - Currently in receipt of EYPP funding

- Currently on the vulnerable children list (currently open to Children's Social Care or Early Help).
13. There are currently 9,000 children who are eligible for Free School Meals within Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole, in addition to eligible children enrolled within the colleges. During the previous Winter Grant Fund and Covid Support Fund the education establishments were issuing approximately £150,000 per school holiday week based on a voucher value of £15. We are therefore profiling expenditure of £300,000 per school holiday week due to an increase in voucher value to £30 per child per week, at a total of £1,800,000. We are also proposing an allocation for school uniform to enable children to keep warm through the winter of £90,000.
 14. Through the previous schemes administered through the Family Information Service (FIS), it is anticipated the FIS would issue vouchers to 900 pre-school age children each holiday. The proposed expenditure across the six weeks of school holidays is £162,000.

Others in need

15. In order to support those existing food providers in section 2, we are proposing the allocation of £80,000 funding to Dorset Community Foundation (DCF) to fund projects within BCP which meet the criteria of the Household Support Fund. DCF are the leading grant provider in BCP and Dorset and have over 25 years' experience as a charitable grant maker. They are approved to administer National Emergency Trust Funding and have robust decision-making procedures and reporting processes in place. The criteria for the grant would be agreed with DCF who will then quickly get funding out to eligible support schemes through their extensive networks in the same way that the Winter Grant Fund was administered in January 2021.

Wider Community Access to Support

16. Citizen's Advice (CA) BCP are well placed to provide support to residents experiencing financial difficulty. They are a well-known and trusted organisation who provide support to thousands of residents across Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole. They have successfully undertaken this function for both the Winter Grant Fund and the summer Covid Support Grant Fund from DWP.
17. It is proposed that CA is provided with £270,000 to support residents experiencing hardship through a dedicated phone line between November 2021 and the end of March 2022 to support food and winter warmth needs through a range of measures. This includes checking eligibility for existing support through pre-payment vouchers (£49 per household x 3), Fighting Fuel Poverty grants (£200), Surviving Winter Grants (£200) as well as a Discretionary Grant funded by BCP Council to help with food and winter warmth costs until end of March 2022.

18. Examples of eligible items would include;

- Utility bills (heating, cooking, lighting)
- Water for household purposes (including drinking, washing, cooking, central heating, sewerage and sanitary purposes)
- Other related essentials that help with food and winter warmth, such as a warm blanket or duvet, warm clothing, heater, boiler service/repairs, essential toiletries, purchase of equipment including fridges, freezers, ovens, etc. This is in recognition that a range of costs may arise which directly affect a household's ability to afford or access food, energy and water.

19. It is proposed that £60,000 is allocated to the Access to Food Partnership to support the increase in demand on community food settings across the conurbation throughout the winter. This includes food banks, community fridges, food pantries etc.

Communications

20. A comprehensive communications plan has been developed to ensure that information about the available support reaches as wide an audience as possible. The key objectives are:

- To raise awareness of the Household Support Grant, the allocation, what we will do and who will benefit
- To raise awareness of the flexible food voucher scheme and support with utility bills, who it's for and how to access - encourage take up
- To raise awareness of the range of community food support available, who can access and to encourage take up
- To encourage local residents to offer support and donate by informing what is needed and where, demonstrating how people's goodwill is making a difference
- Provide one central place where residents can find helpful information and be signposted to other support services such as Let's Talk Money helpline – who can provide guidance to people and look at their situation in a holistic way

21. During the Covid Support Fund grant administration in the summer, there was no dedicated communication support campaign to promote the scheme and applications were significantly lower as a result. The success of the previous winter scheme demonstrated the value of the targeted communication campaign to promote the support available.

Options Appraisal

22. The conditions and guidelines attached to the Household Support Fund detail how the grant can be utilised and what constitutes eligible spend.

23. Option 1 - Preferred option- to approve the funding allocations detailed within this Cabinet report which enable us to react swiftly for the need to implement this funding in a timely manner, ensuring that families and households are able to access support in the most appropriate route to their circumstances. This builds on the knowledge gained through delivering the previous two funding schemes to support residents with access to food and keeping warm. This also uses a strength-based approach, recognising that the Voluntary and Community Sector are often best placed to deliver specialist services to our communities that the Council may not have the skills to deliver.
24. Option 2- rejected- that the Council administer the funding support to households without children, alongside schools, educational setting and FIS administering to households with Children. This option would be resource intensive and require the recruitment of or redeployment of staff and establishment of processes in order to implement the scheme. Given the expectation from the Government that support will begin to be provided in October this is not a preferred option and does not allow us to provide support to our communities in the manner expected via the Fund.
25. Option 3- rejected- that the Council appoint an external body to administer all the grant funding in line with the guidelines. This would not make best use of resources and would be subject to tendering processes in line with the Council's Financial Regulations and would therefore not meet the timescales expected via the Fund.

Summary of financial implications

26. BCP have been awarded £2,653,367.04, to be allocated as follows:

Household Support Fund

BCP Allocation	2,653,367.04
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Initial Spend Plan

FSM Vouchers

October Half Term (1 week- already approved)	300,000.00
December Half Term (2 weeks)	600,000.00
February Half Term (1 week)	300,000.00
Easter Half Term (2 weeks)	600,000.00

Vouchers distributed by FIS

Team

October Half Term (1 week- already approved)	27,000.00
December Holidays (2 weeks)	54,000.00
February Half Term (1 week)	27,000.00
Easter Holidays (2 weeks)	54,000.00
Admin - 3 %	79,601.01
Contingency	100,000.00
Clothing for schools	90,000.00
Citizen's Advice BCP	270,000.00
Access to Food Partnership	60,000.00
Dorset Community Foundation	80,000.00
Communications campaign	10,000.00

Proposed spend	2,651,601.01
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Remaining	1,766.03
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Summary of legal implications

27. The funding will be allocated and spent in accordance with the Household Support Fund guidance provided to Local Authorities by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). Local authorities are required to provide two reports to DWP detailing how the funding has been distributed, approved by the Chief Finance Officer.

Summary of human resources implications

28. The recommendations require Council staff in the Family Information Service team to allocate some of their time for the administration of the voucher scheme prior to each school holiday.

Summary of sustainability impact

29. The proposal has been assessed as having a low impact and there are positive implications for ensuring residents have access to food, warmth and other essential items during the winter. Residents accessing support via Citizen's Advice will also be triaged to assess any opportunities to refer to the LEAP scheme for further support.

Summary of public health implications

30. The recommendations will provide food and fuel support to the most vulnerable and those struggling within the BCP community. The support itself will not directly help to reduce health inequalities however it will help to ensure that some support needs are met.

Summary of equality implications

31. The guidance for the implementation of the Household Support Fund was received on 7 October 2021. Due to the timescales involved with getting approval to accept the funding through Cabinet and Full Council an Equality Impact Assessment has not been completed and viewed by an Equalities Panel as the time of the writing of this report. This is currently taking place to ensure that we consider, plan for and mitigate any negative impacts that are identified.

Summary of risk assessment

32. There is the risk that we are both over and undersubscribed with applications for support. The actual spend will be monitored over time to ensure that budgets can be reallocated as required if we experience this. The profiling of spend is based upon our experience with the two previous supports funds and includes a contingency amount to cover any eventualities.

Background papers

n/a

Appendices

There are no appendices to this report.