

**CABINET
11 OCTOBER 2022**

HOUSEHOLD SUPPORT FUND

**Responsible Cabinet Member -
Councillor Jon Clarke, Children and Young People Portfolio**

**Responsible Director -
Ian Williams – Chief Executive**

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. This report seeks approval for a programme of support to deliver the second extension of the Government funded Household Support Fund (HSF) Extension for the period 1 October 2022 to 31 March 2023.

Summary

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 (HSF) would be extended from 1 October 2022 to 31 March 2023.
3. The guidance was received at the beginning of September and Darlington's draft allocation of £913,853 was received on 22 September 2022. To comply with the guidance and taking into account delivery in previous rounds the following elements for inclusion in the programme are proposed:
 - (a) Food vouchers to families with children on free school meals
 - (b) Fuel vouchers through The Bread and Butter Thing (TBBT)
 - (c) Support for the Food Bank
 - (d) Support for Care Leavers
 - (e) Support for Elderly
 - (f) Support for Vulnerable Groups through the voluntary and community sector
4. Plans for delivery must be submitted to government no later than the 28 October 2022 and be made publicly available including details of any application processes.

Recommendation

5. It is recommended that Cabinet consider and approve:-
 - (a) The proposed programme and estimated costings outlined below.

- (b) Delegation be given to the Chief Executive, in conjunction with the Portfolio Holder for Children and Young People, to amend funding pots as necessary to ensure full utilisation of the grant within the time period.
- (c) A submission to government is made based on the programme outlined below.

Reasons

- 6. The recommendations are supported by the following reasons:
 - (a) To address the criteria laid down in the guidance.
 - (b) In order to secure the grant funding.

Ian Williams
Chief Executive

Background Papers

None

Author:

Seth Pearson x6090

S17 Crime and Disorder	This report does not directly address crime and disorder
Health and Wellbeing	This report proposes actions which will positively impact on health and wellbeing
Carbon Impact and Climate Change	This report does not directly address Carbon Impact and Climate Change
Diversity	This report will positively impact on all communities
Wards Affected	All
Groups Affected	All
Budget and Policy Framework	The report does not represent a change to Council’s budget or policy framework.
Key Decision	This is not a key decision
Urgent Decision	This is an urgent decision as a response to government is required by 28 th October
Council Plan	This report supports the Council Plan by addressing the priority of Supporting the most vulnerable in the borough
Efficiency	This report does not address efficiency issues
Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers	This report proposes providing additional financial support for Care Leavers

MAIN REPORT

Information and Analysis

7. 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 (HSF) would be extended from 01 October 2022 to 31 March 2023. 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. This will be the second extension to the fund since its inception in October 2021.
8. The draft guidance was launched ahead of formal Treasury grant determination and final Local Authority allocations to give Authorities sight of the parameters of the new scheme as early as possible. Draft allocations have just been received with Darlington's being the same as the last round, £913,853.
9. There have been a number of changes to the guidance compared with previous schemes including:
 - (a) there will be no ringfence of any proportion of funding for any particular cohort of people.
 - (b) a requirement for all Authorities to operate at least part of their scheme on an application basis i.e. residents should have the opportunity to come forward to ask for support.
 - (c) There is also an expectation of Authorities to particularly consider those groups who may not have benefitted from any of the recent cost of living support.
10. Eligible spend includes:
 - (a) Energy;
 - (b) Water;
 - (c) Food;
 - (d) Essentials linked to energy and water;
 - (e) Wider essentials related to cost of living;
 - (f) Housing Costs in cases of genuine emergency where existing housing support schemes do not meet this exceptional need;
 - (g) Reasonable administrative costs including reasonable costs incurred administering the scheme.
11. Eligible spend does not include:
 - (a) Advice services such as money management or debt advice;
 - (b) Mortgage costs.

12. As with previous iterations of the Household Support Fund, Authorities are unable to carry forward any underspends from previous schemes. This is because this is a new grant with different conditions.
13. The scheme runs from 1 October 2022 to 31 March 2023 and authorities have been asked to have arrangements in place as quickly as possible to support vulnerable households throughout the grant period. However, officers at DWP recognise that this will be difficult given the short notice of draft allocations.
14. Authorities are asked to provide the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) with a summary of how they are planning to spend the additional funding during the period 1 October 2022 to 31 March 2023. Plans for delivery must be submitted to government no later than the 28 October 2022 and be made publicly available including details of any application processes.

Proposed Options for delivery

15. To comply with the guidance and taking into account delivery in previous rounds the following elements are proposed for inclusion in the programme:
 - (a) Food vouchers to families with children on free school meals
 - (b) Fuel vouchers through TBBT
 - (c) Support for the Food Bank
 - (d) Support for Care Leavers
 - (e) Support for Elderly
 - (f) Support for Vulnerable Groups through the voluntary and community sector

Food Vouchers to families with children on free school meals

16. This has been a feature of both previous rounds of HSF so it is a well established process. Supermarket vouchers are provided to families through a third party provider, Wonde, who send parents e-vouchers to their phones. Schools order the vouchers for parents then invoice the Council for the cost. It is proposed that vouchers to the value of £20 per week are provided per child to families through October ½ term, Christmas and February ½ term (4 weeks). At £84,200 per week the estimated cost is £336,800.

Fuel vouchers through The Bread and Butter Thing (TBBT)

17. This option was part of the first Household Support Fund delivery programme. It involves providing £49 fuel vouchers through the national programme administered by a Public Benefit Entity called Auriga.

18. Costs in providing vouchers are as follows:

Voucher value	£49.00
Voucher Admin Fee (charged by Auriga)	£5.48
Processing cost (TBBT)	£4.37
Unit Price per Voucher	£58.85

19. The experience of TBBT is that there is strong demand for the vouchers so they would look to the Council and partners to refer clients to apply. The process is now well tested and streamlined. Clients text 'FUEL' to a number and will receive a call within 48 hours during which they are taken through application. As opposed to the first round of HSF which targeted those on pre-payment meters, residents with direct debit accounts can now also be supported via a voucher which can be exchanged for cash at fuel top up points (typically newsagents etc). Whilst these payments could be vulnerable to misuse, TBBT will introduce a number of additional steps in the application process to verify genuine need. All potential recipients would be referred by the Council or a trusted voluntary sector organisation providing additional assurance of need.
20. In line with the HSF guidance local authorities are required to target their support to those most in need. The Council has commissioned a consultancy, Policy In Practice to develop a 'Low Income Family Tracker' data dashboard. The dashboard allows the Council to proactively identify Low Income Households that are at-risk now or will be in the future, by analysing and displaying data held by Revenues and Benefits. Policy and Practice are currently working on the data and the dashboard for Darlington is imminent.
21. In advance of the LIFT dashboard being populated, an estimate has been made of the number of vouchers that would reasonably be provided.

Support for Food Banks

22. There is a network of six foodbanks across Darlington. The largest is at King Centre on Whessoe Road. They currently provide around 200 people per week with food. This is a growth of 40% on last year. The other foodbanks collectively provide another 200 food parcels a week making a total of 400 per week across the town. All food banks are seeing an increase in demand which they expect to increase over the winter period. Whilst there are numerous reasons why people use food banks the increase fuel costs is cited frequently as reducing monthly budgets. There is an increase in demand from working families but also a growth in demand from the elderly.
23. At the same time as foodbanks are experiencing increased demand, they are also seeing a reduction in donations. Therefore, what foodbanks need is food.
24. During the first lockdown DBC made its food wholesaler that supplied the Dolphin Centre available to the food banks with Kings Centre acting as the central distribution hub. Making the wholesaler available was the preferred model at that point as there were no grant regimes established at that point to make awards. Kings Centre are prepared to take on a central distribution role again. Providing a grant allowing them to purchase food would be a better model this time as it will allow greater flexibility in meeting fluctuating and differing food requirements.

Support for Care Leavers

25. This featured in the last HSF round supporting a group for which the Council acts as corporate parent. It is proposed that a payment of £100 is made to the 154 care leavers which would cost £15,400.

Support for Elderly

26. Pensioners were a group ringfenced in the guidance for the previous round of HSF. Both the food bank and Age UK are reporting increased requests for support from the elderly. Age UK have been approached to outline a package of support they could deliver and a proposal is in development which will include:

- (a) Home energy checks
- (b) Meals at home
- (c) Lunch clubs
- (d) Subsidised meals in their café
- (e) Attendance at activities
- (f) Respite Care
- (g) Befriending

27. Age UK would look to the Council to alert the most vulnerable elderly people to their services identified via the LIFT dashboard.

Other vulnerable groups

28. A broader discussion is underway with the voluntary sector agencies in town about support for their clients who, for whatever reason, are ineligible for the package proposed or have different, greater needs.

Provisional, estimated costings

Option	Criteria	Estimated No. of Households	Estimated Cost
Food Vouchers	Families with children on free school meals	4,210	£336,800
Fuel Vouchers through The Bread and Butter Thing	Low Income Families	3,600	£211,860
Support for Food Banks	Families in food crisis	2,400	£60,000
Support for Care leavers		154	£15,400
Support for Elderly	Elderly people seeking support with fuel or food	tbd	£50,000
Vulnerable families supported by Voluntary Sector	Vulnerable groups requiring additional support	tbd	£200,000
Administration costs	LIFT dashboard		£25,000
	Other		£14,794
Total			£913,854

Outcome of Consultation

29. Third party organisations that would be involved have been consulted in the preparation of this report and the proposals reflect their input.
30. Discussions with the voluntary and community sector are on-going regarding how support to vulnerable groups through them is provided.