

**CABINET
4 APRIL 2023**

HOUSEHOLD SUPPORT FUND 2023/24

**Responsible Cabinet Member -
Councillor Mike Renton, Stronger Communities 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 third extension of the Government funded Household Support Fund (HSF) Extension for the period 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024.

Summary

2. Guidance has been published on the Government website. As part of a number of measures to provide help with global inflationary challenges and the significantly rising cost of living, the Household Support Fund (HSF) will be extended from 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024.
3. The current programme is being delivered effectively. It is therefore proposed that the programme delivered in this next round takes forward the elements in the current programme.
4. Authorities are required to send a delivery plan to DWP by 17 May 2023 which outlines their intentions for The Fund.

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

Guidance published on the Government website was use in the preparation of this report

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/household-support-fund-guidance-for-local-councils/1-april-2023-to-31-march-2024-household-support-fund-guidance-for-county-councils-and-unitary-authorities-in-england>

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 the start date of the fund is April 1 st 2023
Council Plan	This report supports the Council Plan by addressing the priority of Supporting the most vulnerable in the borough
Efficiency	Distribution of the funds is being realised in the most efficient way.
Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers	This report proposes providing additional financial support for Care Leavers

MAIN REPORT

Information and Analysis

Round 4 guidance

7. Guidance has been published on the Government website. As part of a number of measures to provide help with global inflationary challenges and the significantly rising cost of living, the Household Support Fund (HSF) will be extended from 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024. 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 third extension to the fund since its inception in October 2021.
8. Authorities are required to send a delivery plan to DWP by 17 May 2023 which outlines their intentions for The Fund, clearly setting out their priorities and approach for use of the Fund, and to demonstrate the ways in which they intend to allocate their funding.
9. The objective of The Fund is to provide crisis support to vulnerable households in most need of support to help with significantly rising living costs.
10. Previous rounds of the Fund covered a six month period however this grant covers a full year. Allocations have been published with Darlington's being £1,827,708 which is double the amount of the previous grant provided for 6 months (i.e. the same level pro rata).
11. As with previous rounds of the HSF, Authorities are unable to carry forward any underspends from previous schemes.
12. When administering The Fund, Authorities are encouraged to adopt the following principles:
 - (a) Use discretion on how to identify and support those most in need, taking into account a wide range of information.
 - (b) Authorities are advised to use the funding from 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024 to meet immediate needs and help those who are struggling to afford energy and water bills, food, and other related essentials. Authorities can also use the funding to support households who are struggling to afford wider essentials including housing costs where existing housing support does not meet this need.
13. Authorities are required to have a clear rationale for how households in greatest need have been identified.
14. The guidance for this round of HSF is similar in terms of types of support that can be provided and vulnerable households that are eligible.
15. As in the last round, every area must operate at least part of their scheme on an application basis - in other words, residents should have the opportunity to come forward to ask for support.

16. However, unlike the last round, the Fund may be used to provide supplementary advice services to award recipients, including debt and benefit advice. Authorities are reminded that the primary intention of The Fund is to provide crisis support for households, and it is not expected that a large portion of funding is spent on advice services.

HSF Round 3 programme

17. The programme for round 3 consists of the following elements:

- (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
- (g) Low Income Family Tracker

Food Vouchers to families with children on free school meals

18. This has been a feature of all 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.

Fuel vouchers through The Bread and Butter Thing (TBBT)

19. This provision 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.

20. 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

21. 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. 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). To avoid misuse TBBT has introduced a number of additional steps in the application process to verify genuine need. Recipients can be referred by the Council or a trusted voluntary sector organisation providing additional assurance of need. The LIFT dashboard has also been used to identify vulnerable groups

Support for Food Banks

22. There is a network of six foodbanks across Darlington. The largest is at King Centre on Whessoe Road. All food banks are seeing an increase in demand. Whilst there are

numerous reasons why people use food banks the increase in fuel costs is cited frequently as is reducing monthly budgets. There is an increase in demand from working families but also a growth in demand from the elderly.

23. The Bread and Butter Thing are providing this element of the programme as they have warehousing facilities and connections in the food industry allowing them to purchase food at a discount.

Support for Care Leavers

24. This featured in the last HSF round supporting a group for which the Council acts as corporate parent. A payment of £100 has been made to the 154 care leavers.

Support for Elderly

25. Age UK have been delivering a package of support which includes the following:
 - (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
26. Age UK have alerted the most vulnerable elderly people to their services identified via the LIFT dashboard.

Support for Vulnerable Groups through the voluntary and community sector

27. A collaboration of the voluntary sector has been delivering a flexible programme of support which is tailored to the specific needs of vulnerable individuals. In addition to supporting with food and fuel costs, they have also been improving people's resilience by providing energy saving and energy efficient equipment like electric blankets.

LIFT Dashboard

28. 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 struggling, at risk or are in crisis by analysing and displaying Council and Universal Credit data. Once a particular vulnerable cohort has been identified a letter from the Council is sent alerting them to support available for the most appropriate provider.

Performance

29. The Household Support Fund Round 3 programme has delivered well. A wide range of vulnerable groups have been supported including the elderly, people with disabilities, care leavers, struggling families and working families on low incomes. The LIFT dashboard has

been used to direct resources to those most at need. However, the voluntary sector also organised a town wide mail out so that those households in need but that aren't claiming benefits could receive help.

30. By the end of the fund period each element of the programme will have spent the entirety of the contracted amount.

Recommendation

31. As the guidance for round 4 is similar to that for round 3 and the round 3 programme has delivered well, it is recommended that the round 4 programme continues with all the elements of round 3. However, a number of adjustments will need to be made to run a balanced programme.
32. As there are more school holidays during the spring/summer terms, to pay £20 per holiday week per child on free school meals would cost £1,147,000 approximately, only leaving £680,000 to support other vulnerable groups. It is therefore proposed that a rate of £15 per child per week is paid other than during the summer holidays where a rate of £12 is paid. £15 per week was the original meal entitlement rate, and a lower rate during the summer holidays is justifiable as there will be other activity with food available via the Holiday Activity and Food Programme. If this approach was taken the cost would be as follows:

Term	Weeks	Voucher value	Cost per pupil	Estimated Pupils based on Christmas numbers	Total Cost (£)
Easter	2	15	30.00	4,411	132,330
May	1	15	15.00	4,411	66,165
Summer	6	12	72.00	4,411	317,592
October	1	15	15.00	4,411	66,165
Christmas	2	15	30.00	4,411	132,330
February	1	15	15.00	4,411	66,165
Total	13		177.00		780,747

33. Which would leave £1,046,961 for the rest of the programme, similar pro rata to the current scheme.

34. Provisional estimated costs and outputs of the programme would be as follows:

Item No.	Option	Criteria	Estimated No. of Households	Estimated Cost
1.	Food Vouchers	families with children on free school meals	4,411	£780,747
2.	Fuel Vouchers through The Bread and Butter Thing	Low Income Families	5,500	£323,675
3.	Support for Food Banks	Families in food crisis	2,400	£100,000
4.	Support for Care leavers		154	£30,800
5.	Support for Elderly	Elderly people seeking support with fuel or food	600	£110,000
6.	Vulnerable families supported by Voluntary Sector	Vulnerable groups requiring additional support	2,660	£400,000
7.	Administration costs	LIFT dashboard		£25,000
		Other/contingency		£57,486
	Total			£1,827,708

35. As this round of Household Support Fund can now include provision of supplementary advice, this will be discussed with providers in negotiating agreements.

Financial Implications

36. As the delivery of the programme including administration costs are covered by the fund, these proposals should not impact on the overall finances of the Council.

Procurement Advice

37. The Procurement Team will be involved in writing the agreements with third sector providers of the programme above

Consultation

38. Voluntary sector organisations have been consulted extensively in the development of these proposals

Outcome of Consultation

39. The recommended programme reflects the advice of the voluntary sector