

**CABINET
5 NOVEMBER 2024**

HOUSEHOLD SUPPORT FUND

**Responsible Cabinet Member -
Councillor Mandy Porter, Resources 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 fifth extension of the Government funded Household Support Fund (HSF) Extension for the period 1 October 2024 to 31 March 2025.

Summary

2. 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 October 2024 to 31 March 2025.
3. The current programme is being delivered effectively, meeting spend and output targets. It is therefore proposed that the programme delivered in this next round takes forward most elements in the current programme. A programme aimed at maximising household incomes is also included using the Low Income Family Tracker targeting groups identified as requiring particular attention.
4. As the submission date for a delivery plan to DWP was the 1 November 2024, a submission has been made on the basis of this report, with any amends required following Cabinet's consideration to be made subsequent to this meeting.

Recommendations

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 Stronger Communities, to amend funding pots as necessary to ensure full utilisation of the grant within the time period.
 - (c) Any revisions to the submission made to government be made.

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-october-2024-to-31-march-2025-household-support-fund-guidance-for-county-councils-and-unitary-authorities-in-england>

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Council Plan	The Household Support Fund contributes to the 'Living Well' priority as it provides support to those most in need
Addressing inequalities	Application to the fund is available to anyone who meets the criteria for support without discrimination
Tackling Climate Change	The fund supports action to improve the energy efficiency of resident's homes
Efficient and effective use of resources	This report has no impact on the Council's efficiency programme
Health and Wellbeing	By helping people cope with cost of living it directly impacts positively on resident's health and wellbeing
S17 Crime and Disorder	This report has no direct impact on Crime and Disorder
Wards Affected	All
Groups Affected	All
Budget and Policy Framework	This report does not recommend a change to the Council's budget or policy framework
Key Decision	No
Urgent Decision	Yes
Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers	This report directly, positively affects Care Leavers

MAIN REPORT

Information and Analysis

HSF Extension Guidance

7. Guidance has been received from Government. 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 October 2024 to 31 March 2025. 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 fifth extension to the fund since its inception in October 2021.
8. Authorities are required to send a delivery plan to DWP by 1 November 2024 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 the same as the previous extension in that it is to provide crisis support to vulnerable households in most need of support to help with significantly rising living costs.
10. The last rounds of the Fund covered a full year however this grant covers a six month period. Allocations have been published with Darlington's being £913,853.75 which is the same level as the last extension.
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) Use the funding from 1 October 2024 to 31 March 2025 to meet immediate needs and help those who are struggling to afford household essentials including energy and water bills, food, and wider essentials. Authorities can also use funding to support households with housing costs where existing housing support does not meet this need, and to supplement support with signposting and advice.
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. Greater clarity has been provided regarding this explaining that people

should have the opportunity to self-refer. Authorities should make clear in an accessible format who is eligible for support and how those seeking support can access the fund. A new element has been included in the proposed programme for this round to ensure that the Council is compliant with this part of the guidance.

16. A further addition to the guidance for this round is described as ‘Preventative Support’. The fund may be used to prevent poverty locally and build local resilience. This enables Authorities to fund activity which prevents vulnerable residents from falling into – or falling further into – crisis. Again, this has been considered in designing the new programme.

Household Support Fund programme 1 October 2024 to 31 March 2025

17. The table below outlines the proposed elements of the programme followed by a description of each below. The fund is delivered by third party organisation with a significant proportion being administered by Darlington based voluntary sector organisations. Each element therefore requires negotiation with the provider. The figures given are those tentatively agreed with providers at the time of writing the report but may need slight revision to accommodate more accurate costings or volumes. The report therefore requests delegation be given to the Chief Executive, in conjunction with the Portfolio Holder Stronger Communities, to amend funding pots as necessary to ensure full utilisation of the grant within the time period.

Option	Criteria	Estimated no of households	Estimated cost £
Food Vouchers	families with children on free school meals	5,000	330,000
Support for Food Banks	Families in food crisis	1,200	50,000
Support for Care leavers		160	16,000
Support for Elderly	Fuel allowance	553	96,775
Vulnerable families supported by Voluntary Sector	Vulnerable groups requiring additional support	1,000	190,000
Uniform Shop	Provide good quality uniform to low income families	2,000	25,000
Support for Elderly	Energy proofing home of the elderly	100	15,000
Applications & prevention		1,000	130,000
Administration costs	LIFT dashboard		35,000
	Other/contingency & admin		26,078
Total estimated cost			913,853

Food Vouchers

18. This has been a feature of all previous rounds of HSF and 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. The figure of 5,000 children includes an estimated increase as a result of an auto enrolment campaign that will see scheduled for December 2024.

Support for Food Banks

19. 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.
20. The Bread and Butter Thing provides 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

21. This has featured in all the HSF rounds supporting our care leavers which the Council acts as corporate parent to. A payment of £100 will be made to the estimated 160 care leavers.

Low Income Family Tracker (LIFT) Dashboard programmes

22. 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. The Council delivers support via voluntary sector organisations of Darlington that are involved with Darlington Connect. There will be two campaigns launched at the outset of the programme:
 - (a) **Support for Elderly** - Support will be targeted at those pensioners whose annual income is low enough for them to be in receipt of some form of support from the Council or DWP as a consequence of their low income recorded on the LIFT dashboard but not in receipt of Pension Credit (553 at the time of writing this report).
 - (b) **Households in both fuel and food poverty** - Calculated through the LIFT dashboard by analysing the household income versus known expenditure revealing households with insufficient funds available for fuel and food. There are 1,000 households who will be invited to apply for support in this category.

23. Further cohorts may be included later in the programme dependant on the take up of the first two campaigns.

Uniform Exchange Scheme

24. The Uniform Exchange Scheme, established during the pandemic, has grown in use and is well supported by uniform donations. It reduces a significant cost burden parents experience in sending children to school.

Support for Elderly

25. A targeted programme delivered by Age UK to improve the energy efficiency of homes by installing energy saving devices.

Application Based Support

26. In this round, residents must have the opportunity to apply for support in person, not through direct invitation. Discretionary support will be provided to low income households living in Darlington who are in financial hardship and struggling to manage their essential expenditure. Delivered by CAB, the support will be focussed on households who are being acutely affected by the Cost of Living Crisis and who may be in significant debt.
27. There will be an online application process with assessment made by CAB. Discussions are currently underway to agree the criteria to ensure the right support is given in the context of other available support.

Preventative Support

28. Guidance for this round of HSF explains that the fund may be used to prevent poverty locally and build local resilience. This can include activity which prevents vulnerable residents from falling into – or falling further into – crisis. Therefore, the funds will be allocated to Citizen's Advice Bureau to augment and expand their existing programme of benefit advice.

Financial Implications

29. 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

30. The Procurement Team will be involved in writing the agreements with third sector providers of the programme above. Where appropriate, extension to existing contracts will be used.

Carbon Impact and Climate Change

31. The programme described above includes measures to improve home energy efficiency with a potential positive effect on carbon impact.

Equalities Considerations

32. Application to the fund is available to anyone who meets the criteria for support without discrimination.
33. All support provided will comply with the Council's accessibility policy.

Consultation

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

Outcome of Consultation

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