

**Report to:** Leader of the Council

**Date:** 23 November 2021

**Title:** Household Support Fund

**Report of:** Tim Whelan, Director of Service Delivery

**Cabinet member:** Zoe Nicholson, Leader of the Council

**Ward(s):** All

**Purpose of report:** To consider the proposed Household Support Fund Scheme

**Decision type:** Non key decision

**Officer recommendation(s):** (1) The Leader approves the Household Support Fund Scheme as set out in Appendix 1

(2) Grant the Director of Service Delivery delegated authority to implement, and if necessary, amend the Scheme; such delegated authority to include any measures necessary for or incidental to its management and administration

**Reasons for recommendations:** Executive approval is required for the Scheme which will be used for the purposes of administering the scheme

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## **1 Introduction**

On 6 October 2021 the government announced a package of support for vulnerable households. The £500 million Household Support Fund provides £421 million to help vulnerable people in England, with the devolved administrations receiving almost £80 million. The funding is primarily being used to support households with the cost of essentials, although councils have flexibility to best address local needs. At least 50% of the funding is reserved for households with children. The scheme will run until 31 March 2022 when any unspent funds must be returned to the government.

East Sussex County Council received c£3.9m from this fund and have allocated the Council £120,000 to provide support to vulnerable households and cover the Council's administration costs.

## 2 Proposed scheme

2.1 The Government has set out the principles that should be adopted. They are:

- use discretion on how to identify and support those most in need, taking into account a wide range of information.
- use the funding from 06 October 2021 to 31 March 2022 to meet immediate needs and help those who are struggling to afford food, energy and water bills, and other related essentials. Councils can also use the funding to support households who are struggling to afford wider essentials.
- In exceptional cases of genuine emergency, funding can additionally be used to support housing costs where existing housing support schemes do not meet this exceptional need.

This includes payments made, or committed to, by the Council or any person acting on its behalf, from 06 October 2021 to 31 March 2022. For example, this would allow any food vouchers issued before the end of the funding period to be redeemed in April 2022. All authorities are encouraged to ensure that any vouchers issued are redeemed before the end of the scheme, or shortly thereafter, or consider recycling unused vouchers.

2.2 The criteria for the Council's scheme are that the applicant:

- is in receipt of a means tested benefit
  - Universal Credit
  - Housing Benefit
  - Council tax Reduction
  - Pension Credit
  - Working Tax Credit
  - Child Tax Credit
  - Income Support
  - Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance
  - Income-related Employment and Support Allowance
- and are struggling to meet their utility costs or purchase food

2.3 The rationale for these criteria are:

- that the most financially challenged, and therefore needing support, are likely to be in receipt of one of these benefits

The Council will closely monitor spend and, if spend is below the level expected, consideration will be given to easing the criteria to include those not in receipt of a means-tested benefit.

- 2.4 Applications will be made online through a Portal to enable efficient processing and reduce the risk of fraud. Support will be available for those who may struggle to claim online.  
If residents qualify for assistance with utility bills the award will be paid into their bank account. If they qualify for assistance towards food costs, we will issue vouchers that can be exchanged at most major supermarkets.

### **3 Financial implications**

- 3.1 East Sussex County Council have allocated the Council £120,000 for this scheme from which the Council can deduct reasonable administration costs.
- 3.2 Applications to the scheme will close once the grant is exhausted or 1 April 2022, whichever comes first.

### **4 Consultation**

- 4.1 This additional funding has been made available by Government as an emergency measure to support vulnerable households over the winter months. This is an emergency measure and time does not permit meaningful consultation.

### **5 Legal Implications**

- 5.1 This is a new scheme which needs to be implemented as a matter of urgency and so executive approval for the scheme is being sought from the Leader immediately rather than wait for the next available Cabinet meeting. The Leader is being asked to authorise the Director of Service Delivery to implement and administer the scheme as there is no existing officer delegation in place. The Director of Service Delivery and the Chief Finance Officer have previously been given delegated powers to administer similar schemes such as determining entitlement to rate relief and determining applications for housing, council tax and similar benefits.

*Lawyer consulted 18.11.21*

*Legal ref: 010565-EBC-OD*

### **6 Risk management implications**

- 6.1 There is a risk that, without a scheme in place, the Council would be unable to make payments which would result in the council not being able to offer financial support for to individuals most in need.

### **7 Equality analysis**

- 7.1 None has been undertaken for the reasons set out above, i.e. this is an emergency measure. However, payments will be made in accordance with government guidance and consistency of approach is being secured through the adoption of a countywide scheme.

7.2 It is our view that the scheme is robust and shows no potential for discrimination.

## **8 Conclusions**

8.1 This scheme will provide valuable support to some of the most financially challenged residents, helping them to meet their daily living costs.

8.2 The need to have this scheme in place quickly and for the funds to be spent by 31 March 2022 adds to the need to develop the scheme at pace.

## **9 Appendices**

Appendix 1 – Household Support Fund Scheme

## **10 Background papers**

The background papers used in compiling this report were as follows:

- None