

Report to: Lead Member for Adult Social Care and Health

Date of meeting: 9 November 2021

By: Director of Adult Social Care

Title: Household Support Fund

Purpose: To note the Council’s allocation from the Household Support Fund (“the Fund”) and agree the development of the scheme to distribute grant funding as set out in the report.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Lead Member is recommended to approve the proposed use of a proportion of the Household Support Fund and to delegate to the Director of Adult Social Care authority to implement the scheme.

1 Background

1.1 On 6 October 2021 the government announced the Household Support Fund (“the Fund”) to support those most in need this winter. The Fund runs from 6 October 2021 to 31 March 2022. East Sussex County Council has been allocated **£3,896,783** grant funding from it.

1.2 More information about the Fund is expected, but the government has set out how the Fund should be allocated according to the following criteria: *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 Fund] 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. In exceptional cases of genuine emergency, it can additionally be used to support housing costs where existing housing support schemes do not meet this exceptional need.* Further information can be found on the government website at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-launches-500m-support-for-vulnerable-households-over-winter>

1.3 The Fund is similar to the Winter Covid Fund Support Grant and the Covid Local Support Fund Grant that were provided to local authorities between December 2020 and the end of September 2021. However, the eligibility criteria for the spending of this grant are more flexible: with more of the Fund being able to be provided to individual adults in households (as opposed to families with children) and funding for ‘wider essentials’ now included.

2 Supporting information

2.1 The Council is proposing that the Fund is distributed to households in need in a number of ways, creating a multi-faceted approach that aims to provide support to a wide variety of households. As with previous grant schemes the aim is to utilise existing processes and structures as much as possible to both reduce administration costs but also ensure the tight timelines are met.

2.2 This report focuses on work with the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise organisations (“VCSE organisations”) and District and Borough Councils. A separate report is being taken to the Lead Member for Children’s Services on 15 November 2021. This proposes utilising a proportion of the funding to provide food vouchers to eligible free school meal pupils between December 2021 – March 2022. Additionally, that report also seeks approval to directly distribute some of the Fund to vulnerable families and children via Children’s Services teams that work with this cohort. This includes young people who are ‘care leavers’, families supported by

social care teams, and those with no recourse to public funds. This would leave circa £1.9 million to be distrusted through VCSE organisations and District and Borough Councils.

2.3 As noted above the Fund is similar in nature to previous short-term Government grants that have been provided during the last 18 months. The Council has been able to collaborate with a wide range of VCSE organisations to ensure the funding has been provided to appropriate individuals and groups at pace. VCSE organisations are adept at working with vulnerable people, who are often not known to statutory services, and can distribute funding rapidly. The model of joint working proved successful for the COVID Winter Support Grant.

2.4 The Council has written to all District and Borough Councils, major VCSE organisations including the Voluntary Actions and Social Housing Providers. Follow up conversations are ongoing.

2.5 East Sussex County Council has received over £1million in offers of assistance as to how the Fund could best reach residents in need from the VCSE. These are being considered for eligibility, quality and whether they can be delivered on time. This will also include an assessment that there is a consistent geographic spread across the county as well as reaching people from all the protected characteristics most in need.

2.6 By way of example, the types of suggested use of the funding include support to food banks, local food pantries/fridges, warm home initiatives, fuel vouchers, support for utility bills and white goods.

2.7 Work is underway with all District and Borough Councils to develop and implement a Discretionary Support Scheme. This would look to allow residents in cases of extreme hardship to apply for funding to meet a range of household bills. The principles of a scheme are being agreed, the detailed work as to how to implement it is a priority. At the point of drafting this report it is expected that this would include an application process.

2.8 Reporting, as for all expenditure within the Fund, would have to meet Government requirements. An officer working group with representation from all District and Borough Councils alongside the Council has been established to lead this element of the project.

2.9 Experience gained from the last few grants given with tight timelines for development and implementation have highlighted the need for flexibility as to how the scheme operates. The time available to develop proposals means that there is always a need to tweak allocations and be realistic as to what organisations can achieve. As such all funding provided to partners is provided with clawback mechanisms based on a timetable of allocations to ensure the funding reaches East Sussex residents and isn't returned to Government.

2.10 As with the previous COVID Winter Grant, organisations are able to recoup reasonable administration fees for the delivery of this scheme. All organisations are made aware of this and where necessary this is reported within returns to Government.

2.11 To ensure delivery of the scheme by the end of March 2022 an officer working group consisting of officers from the Councils Adult Social Care & Health and Children's Services has been formed. This group also coordinated the previous COVID Winter Grant Scheme.

2.12 An Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) of the scheme in its entirety is being carried out, which will ensure that the full range of funding meets the Council's equality duties. At this stage, any negative impacts arising from the proposed administration of the Fund are yet to be identified. We are working to ensure that we are able to collect better demographic data about the beneficiaries during the rollout of this scheme. The full EIA can only be completed once the final scheme has been constructed.

3. Conclusion and reasons for recommendations

3.1 The Fund provides an opportunity to support East Sussex families and individuals who are experiencing financial challenges.

3.2 The creation of a multi-faceted scheme working with VCSE organisations and District and Borough Councils allows the Council to support residents in a targeted manner, supporting

residents not in contact with statutory agencies and the discretionary element creates an additional safety net for residents who may not already receiving support.

3.3 The timetable for implementation necessitates broad delegation to be provided to the Director of Adult Social Care to finalise, implement and adjust the scheme as necessary.

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