

Report to: Lead Member for Adult Social Care and Health

Date of meeting: 5 May 2022

By: Director of Adult Social Care

Title: Household Support Fund

Purpose: To note the Adult Social Care use some of 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 Fund as set out in the report and to delegate authority to the Director of Adult Social Care to implement the scheme.

1 Background

1.1 On 23 March 2022 the government announced the Fund to support those most in need. The Fund will run from 1 April 2022 to 30 September 2022 and East Sussex County Council has been allocated £3,896,783.88. This round of the Fund arrived just as the previous Fund finished on 31 March 2022. Due to the late notice of the grant it was not possible to provide 28 days notice of this report through the forward plan. A decision is needed by the Lead Member to ensure that, if agreed, distribution of the funds to partners organisations can take place by early May 2022.

1.2 The new round of the Fund was announced in the Spring Statement at a time when energy prices and the cost of living are increasing. The Department for Work and Pensions have set out how the scheme should be allocated. The criteria has changed slightly from previous funds, with a new focus on pensioners.

‘At least one third of the total funding must be spent on families with children and at least one third must be spent on pensioners. In terms of type of support, the expectation is that the HSF extension should be used in a similar way as the original HSF scheme, with a greater emphasis on supporting households with energy bills. Food and water bills also remain priorities.’

1.3 The Fund follows previous similar schemes which commenced in December 2020 for example the Winter Covid Fund Support Grant, the Covid Local Support Fund Grant and the first Household Support Fund (1 October – 31 March 2022). However, the eligibility criteria for spend of this round of the Fund has changed with a new focus on pensioners and more emphasis on energy bills.

2 Supporting information

2.1 It is proposed 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 the previous Housing Support Fund 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”) Food Partnerships, Warmer Homes and District and Borough Councils. A separate report is being considered by the Lead Member for Education and Inclusion, Special Educational Needs and Disability on 26 April 2022. This proposes utilising a proportion of the funding to provide food vouchers to eligible free school meal pupils between May 2022–September 2022. This would leave circa £2.6 million to be distributed through VCSE organisations Food Partnerships, Warmer Homes and District and Borough Councils.

2.3 As noted above the Fund is similar in nature to the previous round of the Housing Support Fund with the Council collaborating with a wide range of partner organisations to ensure the funding was provided to appropriate beneficiaries at pace.

2.4 Based on partner feedback and the success of partners in distributing the previous Housing Support Fund we are proposing to allocate the Adult Social Care element of the Fund as follows.

Distribution	Amount
VCSE organisations	£750,000
Districts and Borough Councils	£1,590,083
Food Partnerships	£200,000
Warmer Homes	£50,000
Total:	£2,590,083

2.5 The distribution to partner organisations will ensure that all eligible spend for the Fund is covered, the eligible spend includes in the following areas:

2.5.1 *Energy and water. The Fund should primarily be used to support with energy bills for any form of fuel that is used for the purpose of domestic heating, cooking or lighting, including oil or portable gas cylinders. It can also be used to support with water bills including for drinking, washing, cooking, and sanitary purposes and sewerage.*

2.5.2 *Food. The Fund should also primarily be used to provide support with food whether in kind or through vouchers or cash.*

2.5.3 *Essentials linked to energy and water. The Fund can be used to provide support with essentials linked to energy and water (including sanitary products, warm clothing, soap, blankets, boiler service/repair, purchase of equipment including fridges, freezers, ovens, etc.), in recognition that a range of costs may arise which directly affect a household's ability to afford or access energy, food and water.*

2.5.4 *Wider essentials. The Fund can be used to support with wider essential needs not linked to energy and water should if considered appropriate. These may include, but are not limited to, support with other bills including broadband or phone bills, clothing, and essential transport-related costs such as repairing a car, buying a bicycle or paying for fuel. This list is not exhaustive.*

2.5.5 *Housing Costs. In exceptional cases of genuine emergency where existing housing support schemes do not meet this exceptional need, the Fund can be used to support housing costs. Where eligible, ongoing housing support for rent must be provided through the housing cost element of Universal Credit (UC) and Housing Benefit (HB) rather than the Fund. In addition, eligibility for DHPs must first be considered before emergency housing support is offered through the Household Support Fund. The Authority must also first consider whether the claimant is at statutory risk of homelessness and therefore owed a duty of support through the Homelessness Prevention Grant (HPG).*

2.8 Reporting, as for all expenditure within the Fund, will be submitted twice, July 2022 and October 2022. 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 round of the Fund, in particularly the 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 is utilised and reaches East Sussex residents.

2.10 As with the previous Housing Support Fund, partner organisations are able to recoup reasonable administration fees for the delivery of this scheme. All partner 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 September 2022 an officer working group consisting of officers from the Council's Adult Social Care & Health and Children's Services departments will be formed. This group also coordinated the previous Housing Support Fund.

2.12 An Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) of the scheme in its entirety will be 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, pensioners and individuals who are experiencing financial challenges.

3.2 The creation of a multi-faceted scheme working with VCSE organisations, Food Partnerships, Warmer Homes 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 be 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.

3.4 The Lead Member is recommended to approve the proposed use of approximately £2,590,083 of the fund to support the beneficiaries with support in accordance with the eligible spend outlined in Government guidance up until 30 September 2022.

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Local Members: All

Background Documents: None