

**Report to:** Lead Member for Adult Social Care and Health

**Date of meeting:** 25 April 2024

**By:** Director of Adult Social Care and Health

**Title:** Household Support Fund 2024

**Purpose:** To note the proposed use of the Household Support Fund (“the Fund”) for 1 April 2024 – 30 September 2024 and agree the development of a scheme to distribute grant funding as set out in this report

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**RECOMMENDATIONS: The Lead Member is recommended to:**

- 1. Approve the proposed plan for the use of the Fund in East Sussex in 2024 as set out in this report; and**
  - 2. Delegate to the Director of Adult Social Care and Health authority to implement the scheme including detailed allocation decisions of the final allocation of the delivery partner element (£1,544,284).**
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## **1 Background**

1.1 On 6 March 2024 in the Spring Budget the Chancellor announced that the Fund would be extended for a further six months, from 1 April 2024 to 30 September 2024, with a further £421m of grant funding being made available. Full details including a launch letter, Guidance, Grant Determination and Delivery Plan and Reporting requirements were received on 26 March 2024.

1.2 East Sussex County Council (ESCC) has been allocated £3,896,783.88 for the six-month extension period. Payments will be made in two instalments in arrears after the submission of a Delivery Plan and an interim Management Information (MI) return and the final MI return at the end of grant period to the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP).

1.3 Key parts of the 2024 Fund guidance include:

- Local authorities should use the Fund to meet immediate needs and help those who are struggling to afford household essentials including energy and water bills, food, and wider essentials. Local 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.
- The Fund is intended to cover a wide range of low-income households in need, including families with children of all ages, pensioners, unpaid carers, care leavers and disabled people, larger families, single-person households, and those struggling with one-off financial shocks or unforeseen events.
- There is an emphasis on providing support to households that are in the most need – particularly those who may not be eligible for the other support that the government has recently made available. It is worth noting that the apparent cessation of the Cost-of-Living payments may increase need/demand for the Fund across groups who would have been eligible for those payments (this includes those on income related benefits, disabled claimants and pensioners).
- Local authorities have the flexibility to identify which vulnerable households are in most need of support and apply discretion when identifying eligibility.

- Local authorities must have a clear rationale or documented policy/framework outlining the approach, including how eligibility will be defined and how households access the Fund. Local authorities are expected to review any existing approach and to have a strong rationale for targeting so that funding is available to the households who most need it.
- The guidance also indicates that at least part of the spending should be application based, i.e. that residents should have the opportunity to request support. The definition is flexible, and applications can be made directly via the local authority or via third parties.

## **2 Supporting information.**

2.1 In previous years the Council has distributed the Fund through a variety of partners, including District and Borough Councils (D&B councils) and the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) sector, and all partners have been able to use all their allocated amounts to reach eligible beneficiaries. This approach is in line with the updated Fund guidance. Therefore, the Council is proposing to continue to allocate Fund monies in the following ways:

- Food vouchers (Huggg vouchers) for 2 to 19-year-olds eligible for Free School Meals, to cover the school holiday periods.
- The Council's Children's Services teams that provide support to vulnerable families and children, administering funding directly to these teams to meet identified needs.
- Allocations to VCSEs to target individuals, including pensioners, and disabled people at risk of food and fuel poverty.
- Allocations to each of the five D&B councils to administer funding to households, including pensioners, who are known to be eligible and in need.
- Allocation to Food Banks and Food Partnerships to distribute to those in need.

2.2 The systems already set up through previous rounds of the Fund to distribute the funding are working well and it is proposed to continue to use these systems.

2.3 Over the recent years the cost-of-living pressures have grown and are now affecting people and families previously unaffected, this has meant that many Fund partners are seeing an increase in the people requesting or requiring support.

2.4 The Fund scheme has a completed Equalities Impact Assessment (EqIA) which helps ensure people with protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 are not disadvantaged and that all groups can access the Fund if they meet eligibility requirements.

## **3. Proposal**

3.1 Distributing the Council's share of the Fund to the same partners as previously (and as set out in paragraph 2.1 of this report) will ensure continuity in the allocation of support to the full range of beneficiary groups and will facilitate swift and effective administration of the Fund.

3.2 The proposal this year is to build on previous successful delivery of the Fund and to increase the Hugg vouchers to families during the summer holidays from £50 to £60.

3.3 This increase in the value of Huggg vouchers over the summer holidays brings this support to families eligible for Free School Meals during this period more in line with other school holidays and matches the offers that some other local authorities provide during the summer. This support goes directly to families in need, with no administration costs.

3.4 In order to fund the proposed increase in value of Hugg vouchers during the summer holiday period, a reduction in the Fund allocation to other delivery partners will be necessary. These

delivery partners have all been able to reach eligible beneficiaries in previous years, and there is significant local and national evidence of demand amongst all beneficiary groups. How the required reduction in the allocation to other delivery partners will be distributed will be subject to further consultation and engagement with those partners.

3.5 In order to ensure the remainder of the Fund is allocated after careful consideration of the updated guidance, resident need and in consultation with delivery partners, it is recommended that the authority to determine the final allocation of the delivery partner element of the Fund (£1,544,284) is delegated to the Director of Adult Social Care and Health.

#### **Allocations Table - (1 April 2024 – 30 September 2024)**

<b>Partner</b>	<b>Amount (£)</b>	<b>Note</b>
Free School Meal eligible pupils Huggg food vouchers	£2,152,500	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Easter holiday - £30</li> <li>• May half-term - £15</li> <li>• Summer holiday - £60</li> </ul>
Children's Services Teams	£200,000	Families in need
Delivery partners: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• D &amp; B councils</li> <li>• VCSE sector</li> <li>• Food Banks and Food Partnerships</li> </ul>	£1,544,284	Detailed breakdown to be decided with further consideration of updated guidance
<b>Total</b>	<b>£3,896,784</b>	

#### **4. Risks**

4.1 The main risk with this scheme is the ability of the Council to distribute its full Fund allocation in line with the DWP Guidance, especially given the shorter timescale for this extension. This risk is mitigated by using the existing schemes and partners to administer the funding.

4.2 Any other risks identified will be picked up through the Council's Household Support Fund Steering Group who oversee the detailed plan for implementation and monitor the new extension period.

4.3 As a national scheme there is increased scrutiny over the Council's decisions on how this round of the Fund will be spent has been allocated. To mitigate this risk, we will develop a communications plan that sets out the key messages and the timing of these messages, in line with Fund communication guidelines which are part of the guidance.

4.4 Utilising VCSE and other delivery partners to implement the scheme adds considerable value in terms of local community knowledge and an ability to engage with residents who may not be in contact with statutory services.

4.5 The proposed re-allocation of funds to increase the value of the summer holiday food vouchers presents a risk that the residual balance distributed through the VCSEs, D&B councils and Food Partnerships/Banks will be insufficient to meet needs. This risk will be mitigated by reviewing the exact allocations those partners receive in line with updated guidance documents and the priorities within them and in consultation with delivery partners.

## **5. Conclusion and reasons for recommendations**

5.1 The announcement of an extension to the Fund provides an opportunity to support households with children, households with pensioners, households with a disabled person and other vulnerable households within East Sussex who are experiencing financial challenges and will be welcomed by partners.

5.2 The Lead Member is recommended to:

1. approve the proposed plan for the use of the Fund in East Sussex in 2024 as set out in this report; and
2. Delegate to the Director of Adult Social Care and Health authority to implement the scheme including detailed allocation decisions of the final allocation of the delivery partner element (£1,544,284).

### **MARK STANTON**

#### **Director of Adult Social Care and Health**

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### **LOCAL MEMBERS**

All

### **BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**

None