

Report to: Lead Member for Education and Inclusion, Special Educational Needs and Disability

Date of meeting: 30 April 2024

By: Director of Children’s Services

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

RECOMMENDATIONS:

The Lead Member is recommended to:

1. Approve the proposed plan for the use of the latest allocation of grant monies from the Fund to provide support to households with children in East Sussex as set out in this report; and
 2. Delegate to the Director of Children’s Services authority to implement this part of the scheme.
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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 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 new the Fund’s updated 2024 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 HSF 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 ESCC 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 updated Fund guidance. Therefore, ESCC is proposing to continue to allocate Fund monies in the following ways:
- Food vouchers (Huggg vouchers) for 2–19 year-olds eligible for Free School Meals, to cover the school holiday periods.
 - ESCC Children’s Services teams that provide support to vulnerable families and children, administering funding directly to these to meet identified needs.
 - Allocations to VCSE sector to target individuals, including pensioners, and disabled people at risk of food and fuel poverty.
 - Allocations to each of the five District and Borough Councils (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 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 includes an 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 ESCC’s latest allocation 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 Huggg 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 more in line with what has been available during other school holiday periods and matches the offers that some other local authorities provide

during the summer. This support goes direct to families in need, with no administration costs.

- 3.4 In order to fund the proposed increase in the value of summer holiday Huggg vouchers, 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. This part of the scheme is being overseen by the Adult Social Care and Health Department and a report to the Lead Member was considered on 25 April 2024.
- 3.5 The portion of the Fund that the Children’s Services Department will manage is **£2,352,500**. The Lead Member agreed at the 25 March meeting the allocation of Fund monies for the Easter holiday Huggg vouchers to ensure that these could be distributed in time for the Easter holidays. The proposal in this report is to provide food vouchers to eligible free school meal pupils of £15 for the May half-term and £60 for the summer holidays. There are approximately 20,575 pupils eligible for free school meals. £200,000 will also be distributed via Children’s Services teams directly to vulnerable families in need.

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

Partner	Amount (£)	Note
Free School Meal eligible pupils Huggg food vouchers	£2,152,500	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Easter holiday - £30 <i>(already approved and allocated)</i> May half-term - £15 Summer holiday - £60
Children's Services Teams	£200,000	Families in need
Delivery partners: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> District & Borough Councils Voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) Food Banks and Food Partnerships 	£1,544,284	Detailed breakdown to be decided with further consideration of new guidance
Total	£3,896,784	

4. Risks

- 4.1 The main risk with this scheme is the ability of ESCC to distribute all the funding 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 Household Support Fund Steering Group who oversee the detailed plan for implementation and will monitor the new extension period.
- 4.3 As a national scheme there is increased scrutiny of ESCC’s decisions about how this round of Fund monies 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 updated 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 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 scheme 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 latest round of the Fund in East Sussex in 2024 as set out in this report; and
 - 2. delegate to the Director Children's Services the authority to implement the scheme.

ALISON JEFFERY

Director of Children's Services

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LOCAL MEMBERS

All

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

None