

Report to:	Lead Member for Education and Inclusion, Special Educational Needs and Disability
Date of meeting:	7 October 2024
By:	Director of Children's Services
Title:	Household Support Fund 2024
Purpose:	To note the proposed use of the Household Support Fund for 1 October 2024 – 31 March 2025 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 funding from the Household Support 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 the plan, in collaboration with the Director of Adult Social Care and Health.**
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1 Background

1.1 On 2 September 2024 the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and HM Treasury announced that the Household Support Fund (HSF/the Fund) would be extended for a further 6 months, from 1 October 2024 to 31 March 2025, with a further £421m of funding across England. Full details were received on 25 September, and guidance and conditions are expected to closely mirror previous rounds of HSF and the national amount is the same as it was for the first 6 months of 2024-25.

1.2 East Sussex County Council (ESCC) will be allocated £3,896,783.88 for the 6-month extension period, and payments will be made in 2 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 the grant period to the DWP.

1.3 The new guidance and conditions, received on 25 September, will be reviewed and arrangements will be made to ensure any new features are accommodated.

2 Supporting information.

2.1 In previous rounds, East Sussex has distributed HSF through a variety of partners, including District and Borough Councils and 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 HSF guidance to date. Therefore, it is proposed to continue to allocate funding for Household Support Fund in the following ways:

- Food vouchers (Huggg vouchers) for 2–19 year-olds eligible for Free School Meals, to cover the school holiday periods.
- Children's Services teams that provide support to vulnerable families and children administering funding directly to these 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 5 District and Borough Councils (D&Bs) 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.
- Allocation to the ESCC Warmer Homes programme.

2.2 The systems set up through previous Household Support Funds to distribute the funding are working well so 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 HSF partners are seeing an increase in the people requesting or requiring support.

2.4 The HSF has an Equalities Impact Assessment (EqIA) which helps ensure people protected under the Equality Act are not disadvantaged and that all groups can access the Fund if they meet eligibility requirements. This will be reviewed in the light of new guidance.

3. Proposal

3.1 Distributing the grant to the same partners that East Sussex worked with last time (as set out in 2.1) and maintaining this approach 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.

3.3 The allocation of Hugg vouchers will mirror the need for the holiday period that falls in the 6-month period of this round of HSF. This includes:

- October half-term – one week at £15 per week per eligible family
- Christmas holiday – total of £50 for the two weeks per eligible family
- February half term – one week at £15 per week per eligible family

This support goes direct to families in need with limited administration costs.

3.4 In order to ensure the remainder of the Fund is allocated after careful consideration of the new guidance, resident need and in consultation with delivery partners, it is recommended that delegating decision making on the details of final allocations to the Director of Children’s Services.

Allocations Table - (1 October 2024 – 31 March 2025)

Partner	Amount (£)	Note
Free School Meal eligible pupils Hugg food vouchers (19,400 pupils)	£1,552,000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • October half-term - £15 • Christmas holiday - £50 • February half-term - £15 £80 in total
Children's Services Teams	£300,000	Families in need
Delivery partners: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • District and Borough Councils • Voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) • Food Banks and Food Partnerships 	£2,044,784	Detailed breakdown to be decided with further consideration of new guidance
Total	£3,896,784	

4. Risks

- 4.1 The main risk with the delivery of the HSF is the ability of the Council to distribute all the funding in line with the DWP Guidance, especially given the short timescale for this extension. This risk is mitigated by using the existing schemes, partners and processes 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 continually monitor the new extension period.
- 4.3 As a national scheme, there is increased scrutiny over the Council's decisions on how this funding has been allocated. To mitigate this risk, a communications plan will be developed that sets out the key messages and the timing of these messages, in line with HSF 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 allocation of funds considers the increased financial pressures on all households and partner organisations over the Winter period, with all partners reporting a level of need that exceeds demand. ESCC will ensure best use of HSF by reviewing the exact allocations with partners in line with updated guidance documents and in consultation with delivery partners.

5. Conclusion and reasons for recommendations

- 5.1 The announcement of an extension to the HSF 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 therefore recommended to approve the proposed plan for the use of the Household Support Fund in East Sussex for the extension as set out in this report.
- 5.3 The Lead Member is recommended to delegate to the Director Children's Services the authority to implement the plan.

CAROLYN FAIR

Director of Children's Services

Contact

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LOCAL MEMBERS

All

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

None