

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

Date of meeting: 26 September 2022

By: Director of Children’s Services

Title: Household Support Fund (Three)

Purpose: To consider the proposed Children’s Services use of a proportion of the third and latest extension of the Household Support Fund (“HSF 3”) and agree the development of a scheme to distribute grant funding as set out in the report

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Lead Member is recommended to:

1. approve the proposed use of £1,680,000 of the Household Support Fund, to provide support to households with children as set out in paragraph 2 of the report; and
2. delegate authority to the Director of Children’s Services to take all action necessary to implement the scheme

1 Background

1.1 On 26 May 2022 the government announced the third iteration of the Household Support Fund (HSF 3) to support those most in need. The extension will run from 1 October 2022 to 31 March 2023.

1.2 Contextually the grant arrives just as the last Household Support Fund (HSF2) will finish on 30 September 2022. The grant follows previous similar schemes which commenced in December 2020: the Winter Covid Fund Support Grant, the Covid Local Support Fund Grant and earlier rounds of the Household Support Fund (HSF 1) (1 October – 31 March 2022, and 1 April – 30 September 2022).

1.3 HSF 3 arrives at a time when the cost-of-living crisis and the escalating energy costs are a key consideration for the government, and at the forefront of the public’s concerns.

1.4 The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) has set out how HSF 3 funds should be allocated. The criteria have changed slightly from previous rounds, as follows:

- Beneficiary groups are households with children, households with pensioners, households with a disabled person and other vulnerable households.
- 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, including the Cost-of-Living Payments set out on 26 May 2022, Energy Support Scheme detailed on 29 July and the Council Tax Rebate. The Government expects residents to be able to contact authorities to enquire as to eligibility.

1.5 East Sussex County Council (ESCC) expects to be allocated a total of **£3,896,783.88** for the HSF 3 scheme. This is approximately the same amount as our allocation for the last two rounds of the Household Support Fund.

2 Supporting information

2.1 It is proposed that HSF3 is distributed to households in need in several ways including:

Food vouchers for families of 2-19 year olds eligible for Free School Meals, to cover the school holiday periods during the HSF 3 time period	£1,480,000
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Children Services Teams that provide support to vulnerable families and children administered funding directly to these to meet identified needs	£200,000
VCSE partners to support individuals, at risk of food and fuel poverty through using existing referral mechanisms	£800,000
Districts and Boroughs to support adults, especially to those not eligible for the other support that the government has recently made available, including the Cost-of-Living Payments, Energy Support Scheme, and the Council Tax Rebate.	£1,216,783
Foodbanks and Food partnerships	£200,000
Total:	£3,896,783

2.2 The portion of the Household Support Fund that the Children's Services Department will manage is £1,680,000. The proposal is to provide food vouchers to eligible free school meal pupils of £15 for the October half-term, £50 for the Christmas holiday and £15 for the February half-term. There are approximately 18,500 pupils eligible for free school meals. £200,000 will also be distributed via Children's Services teams directly to vulnerable families in need.

2.3 The timescale set out by Government means that funding will need to continue to be distributed via the systems set up through HSF 2 and through augmenting existing provision within the county, rather than establishing a new dedicated process.

2.4 The DWP has indicated that it is reasonable for a local authority to plan for HSF 3 using the draft guidance and the allocations from HSF 2 as a guide. However, once DWP issues the final guidance and local authority allocations (which is expected to be on 1st October 2022), if agreed, this report provides delegated authority to the Director of Children's Services to make the following amendments in line with DWP's final guidance and local authority allocations, namely:

- beneficiary groups, eligible spend, or monitoring
- any other changes to HSF 3 that are required to ensure ESCC's adherence to DWP's final guidance and local authority allocations
- and any other changes in response to new announcements from the government on energy costs to ensure this funding is directed to those most in need.

2.5 In light of the current cost of living crisis and the increase in energy prices, there is a high probability that applications for this fund will exceed the funding available. The Household Support Fund Project Officers (Task and Finish) Group (ESCC Children's and Adult Services, and District and Borough Council officers) will oversee the detailed plan for implementation and monitor the scheme to end of March 2023.

2.6 Utilising VCSE 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 comfortable with statutory services.

2.7 There is a likelihood that the Household Support Fund will be extended for a further six months from 1 April 2023 and that notice of this extension will once again be very short. Planning will take place in late winter on the assumption that the fund will continue and that ESCC is ready to deliver at pace if this is the case.

3. Conclusion and reasons for recommendations

3.1 HSF 3 provides a further opportunity to extend the support to households with children, households with pensioners, households with a disabled person and other vulnerable households within East Sussex who are experiencing financial challenges.

3.2 The Lead Member is recommended to approve the proposed use of £1,680,000 of HSF 3 funding, to provide support to households with children and to delegate authority to the Director of Children's Services to implement the scheme.

ALISON JEFFERY

Director of Children's Services

Contact

Contact Officer: Jessica Stubbings, Senior Manager Partnerships and Governance
Email jessica.stubbings@eastsussex.gov.uk
Telephone 07827 084705

LOCAL MEMBERS

All

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

None