



WEST NORTHAMPTONSHIRE COUNCIL CABINET

14 JUNE 2022

**Cabinet Member for Adult Care, Wellbeing and Health
Integration: Councillor Matt Golby**

Report Title	Household Support Fund: Scheme 2 Recommendations
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List of Appendices

None

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1. The Household Support Fund (2) has been provided with a budget of £2,599,628.53 from Department for Work and Pensions. This fund will be distributed, via various packages, to families and individuals in specific financial hardship over the course of the summer period. The report sets out our proposed local strategy for distribution and outlines how

along with the local Voluntary Sector we will identify those that meet the criteria recommended in this document and attract appropriate referrals for those most in need.

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 The Household Support Fund (2), announced by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) on the 31st March 2022, is the second version of the Fund, the first (HSF1) operated between 1st December 2021 and 31st March 2022 across West Northamptonshire.
- 2.2 The DWP has given local authorities a wide discretion on how these funds should be used, which is to support those most in need. *“The expectation is that it should primarily be used to support households in the most need with food and energy bills because of the recent cost of living increases. The fund can also be used to support households with essential costs related to those items and other essential household costs.”*
- 2.3 The latest fund can be delivered to households between 1 April 2022 and 30 September 2022. Previously, there was a stipulation that a minimum of 50% of the fund must be used to support families with children. However, in HSF (2) we have been advised to split the fund; one third to families with children, one third pensioners and the final third to households demonstrating severe financial hardship.
- 2.4 West Northamptonshire Council has been allocated a sum of £2,599, 628.53. Payment for the grant will be made in arrears, following the submission of spending returns to the DWP by 22 July 2022 (for the period to 30 June 2022) and 21 October 2022 (for the full length of the scheme).
- 2.5 The report provides a background to the fund and the recommendations section provides the key focus of the type of support outlined. This support ranges from holiday school meal vouchers for the summer holidays; pensioners who are already receiving a Pension Credit and those who are severely disabled; to a food and fuel concept operated through the voluntary sector that identifies the individuals and families in severe financial hardship. Management and oversight will be provided by the Public Health Recovery and Wellbeing Programme Team.

3 Recommendations

- 3.1 It is recommended that the Cabinet:
- a) Note that the Council has wide discretion in the allocation of the Household Support Fund (2);
 - b) Approve the allocation of funds set out in the chart in paragraph 6 of the report;
 - c) Approve the control and oversight approach set out at paragraph 8.1.1 of the report; and
 - d) Note that depending on take up of the proposed scheme it may have to be adjusted in order to ensure the full allocation is not under or over allocated. Any adjustment will be managed within the terms of existing DWP guidelines.

4. Reason for Recommendations

4.1 Reasons for Recommendations:

- To underpin the West Northamptonshire Anti-Poverty Strategy and ensure residents most in need receive support
- To ensure that the distribution of funds meets the wider communities' financial needs, where other grants and funding are not available
- To ensure the level of duplication of grants for the same purpose is be minimised
- To ensure that the maximum assistance is provided to residents in greatest need and that the allocation of funding is fully utilised to meet the needs of residents.

5. Report Background

5.1 Building on the Success of the 2021/22 Scheme

This report follows on from a very successful Household Support Fund scheme operating from December 2021 until March 2022 (referenced as HSF1). During the operationalisation of HSF 1 we were able to build a highly efficient on-line application portal which enabled residents to self-service their application rather than utilising the voluntary sector set up. Not only did this provide an effective option but it also removed a level of pressure from our partner, the Citizens Advice Bureau. In total we were able to distribute close to 100k food and fuel vouchers across Northamptonshire and issue all funds provided for, as well as achieving over 82% of the funding going to families with children.

5.2 The proposed criteria for the 2022 Scheme and links to the priorities in the Anti-Poverty

The Anti-Poverty Strategy has been recently approved by Cabinet and the additional fund presents an opportunity to start to progress on some of the actions and priorities. The vision and strategic priorities are set out below: -

5.3 Anti-Poverty Vision and Strategic Priorities

'Our Vision is for a fairer and more inclusive West Northamptonshire, where everyone is able to live their best life, prosperous and fulfilling, free from poverty and inequality'

5.4 Level of Need in 2019

- 13% (10,231) of children were living in poverty.
- 10.8% (9,398) Older people were living in poverty
- 9.6% (37,318) People were living in income deprivation

5.5 Strategic Priorities

- Support People who are struggling in Poverty Now
- Prevent People from falling into Poverty in the first place
- Continue to influence the Government and other national organisations to get a better deal for the communities in West Northamptonshire already.

5.6 June 2022 – September 2022 suggested focus

The report recommends that the beneficiary targets (detailed in section 6) are reached to acknowledge the increased hardship that families and individuals may experience over the period June 2022 to September 2022. The recommendations also reflect the national governments desire to maintain the school child holiday meal system for the summer holidays and to incorporate pensioners specifically in the scope of recipients

6. Proposed Scope and Diversity of Funds Distribution:

	WNC	Notes
DWP Grant Allocation	£2,599,628	As published by DWP on 31.3.22
TOTAL FUNDS AVAILABLE	£2,599,628	
Summer School Holiday Food Vouchers	£ 842,400	10,530 @ £20 school holiday food vouchers for children on Free School Meals for 4 weeks (see note 7.3)
Pension Credit Recipients	£650,000	£100 payment for each recipient (6,500)
Pension Credit Top Up for those with severe disabilities	£140,000	£50 payment top up for each eligible recipient (2,800)
Payments to Pensioners who are not on Pension Credit but suffering severe financial hardship and identified through the appropriate voluntary agency's	£60,000	A maximum of £100 food voucher to each eligible household to offset the recent increases in food and fuel
Payments to households suffering severe financial hardship and identified through the voluntary sector	£837,793	Maximum of £100 voucher to over 8,000 households in severe financial hardship via an energy or food voucher
Grant Administration	£ 69,435	Estimated at 2.7%.
TOTAL FUNDS TO DISTRIBUTE	£2,599,628	

7. Issues and Choices

7.1 The WNC fund distribution is in adherence to the guidelines set nationally by Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and maintains a clear mandate that:

- 33.3% of funds must be received by families with children
- 33.3% of funds must be received by pensioners
- 33.3% of funds must be received by households demonstrating severe financial hardship

- 7.2 Options were considered in relation to each category of funding and the way to establish the most effective and efficient way of providing the payment to the recipient. This related to a 'push' approach for an existing registered cohort of households (i.e., Free School Holiday database, Pension Credit database) and a 'pull' approach for applicants who applied into the fund and where eligibility was assured (i.e., voluntary sector applications)
- 7.3 An option to increase the Free School Holiday Food payments from 4 weeks to 6 weeks has been discussed and approved in principle. However, the Council awaits formal confirmation from DWP Policy Group that we can re-use the expired vouchers from previous schemes and the relevant funds available, for HSF2. If permission is provided a separate communication will be issued and the changes to the planned payments will be operationalised.
- 7.4 Discussions are currently underway with Northamptonshire Community Foundation, an independent grant-making charity, and other partners, fund holders and donors to ensure projects make a sustainable impact on local needs and help to make the most out of charitable giving and targeted funding.
- 7.5 The Foundation deliver a variety of funding locally and in 2020 awarded £2.6 million and £1.2 million in 2021. The funds they distribute focus on improving the lives of most disadvantage communities and dealing with child poverty, unemployment, homelessness and domestic violence and social isolation. Working with the foundation gives the opportunity to lever in other funds to the target communities.
- 7.6 Work is also underway to work with the Foundation and enhance the offer to these communities with additional mental health and wellbeing support and information, including the training of volunteers and support in promoting pathways. The foundation has rigorous processes in place to report back on outcomes achieved and provide evaluation of the programme

8 Implications (including financial implications)

8.1 Resources and Financial

- 8.1.1 The Household Support Fund is incremental to the base budget for 2022/2023. Resources are recommended to be hired and/or retained from the existing HSF team on temporary contracts to manage the fund and to provide clear distribution controls on behalf of the Executive. The oversight and leadership will be provided by Project Managers from the Public Health Recovery and Wellbeing Programme at notional cost. The staffing costs will be extracted from the fund as allowed for in the fund terms. All fund monies are expected to be distributed into the community by the end of the 3rd quarter.
- 8.1.3 The Northamptonshire Community Foundation receive a fee for the administration of funds which will be distributed to vulnerable households. The fee cap is currently being negotiated however if the programme can also be extended to include additional health and wellbeing support this could be funded from alternative funding to ensure there is

maximum distribution of the household support fund to the community and additional health and wellbeing outcomes are achieved withing the wider programme.

8.2 Legal

8.2.1 There are no legal implications arising from the proposal. An Equalities Impact Assessment has been undertaken and the proposals are in accordance with the requirements of the fund. No negative impacts have been identified.

8.3 Risk

Identified Risks:

8.3.1 Excess requests, for use of funds, from the assumptions provided and therefore the grant will be exhausted. The mitigation would include tracking and monitoring the utilisation of funds and escalate where run rate projections identify the materialisation of the risk. Thereafter the possibility of the utilisation of other funding that is available, as appropriate.

8.3.2 Duplicate requests may be received. The mitigation will be in the form of a control record, held at the centre, of all beneficiaries receiving the drawdowns from the fund.

8.3.3 The volume of applications exceeds the capacity of the voluntary sector to turn around the vouchers in a reasonable timescale. The mitigation will be capacity modelling prior to 'go-live' and continuous monitoring during the delivery period.

8.3.4 There are no other significant risks arising from the proposed recommendations in this report.

8.4 Consultation

8.4.1 Consultation with internal HSF stakeholders has occurred and a formal lessons learnt document has been produced post the closure of HSF (1). Consultation with the Citizens Advice Bureau has also been addressed to provide input to the wider use of the Voluntary Sector. As a result, changes to the application process and the back-office procedures have been updated to be more efficient and user friendly.

8.5 Consideration by Overview and Scrutiny

There is a requirement to ensure the fund is used within the timescales outlined above. These timescales did not allow for prior consultation with Overview and Scrutiny.

8.6 Climate Impact

There are no immediate climate impacts arising from the allocation of funds.

8.7 Community Impact

8.7.1 The community impact will be extremely positive. Care will be taken when referrals are assessed to ensure that if the Household Support Fund is not appropriate that other funds/packages are identified and handed over i.e., persons on universal credit but not eligible for the severe hardship payment. Communication across the community regarding the fund, the purpose of the fund and where advice can be sought will be critical to the success of accessing the support.

8.7.2 WNC Corporate Plan – ‘Living Your Best Life’

The WNC Corporate Plan is clear on the role that the system must play in understanding the wider determinates of Health and Wellbeing as well tackling Health Inequalities. A key driver within the Corporate Plan is a category entitled ‘Improving Life Chances’ which includes references to:

- Adopt and progress early years’ prevention and intervention offers to help children get the best start in life
- Keep people safe and well in their own homes as long as possible, avoiding lengthy hospital stays
- Grow our community hubs providing public services at the heart of communities
- Support residents to have healthier lifestyles and reduce inequalities
- Develop an anti-poverty strategy

8.7.3 All these elements were utilised in determining the scope of the HSF2 beneficiaries across the three categories that were advised by DWP to fund. Although it is recognised that the HSF scheme is unlikely to release families from long term sustainable food and fuel poverty it is the belief that with the short-term actions and the long-term strategy working towards a common goal that the community benefit will be accelerated.

8.8 Communications

8.8.1 The communications plan is being developed and will focus on a range of key messages aimed at raising awareness and encouraging take-up, including Frequently Asked Questions, PR, social media and website content, updates and clear signposting to other grants and support.

8.8.2 A particular focus will be taken to include local community health and wellbeing partners including GPs, Social prescribers and the community and voluntary sector.

9 Background Papers

9.1 Household Support Fund Paper and Guidelines [HSF DWP Guidelines 31.3.22](#)