

REPORT OF THE INTERIM SERVICE DIRECTOR, PLACE AND COMMUNITIES

HOUSEHOLD SUPPORT FUND – PHASE SIX

Purpose of the Report

1. To seek approval for the outline criteria and allocation model for Phase Six of the Household Support Fund in order to support those in immediate need across Nottinghamshire for the period 1 October 2024 to 31 March 2025.
2. This is a Key Decision because it will result in expenditure of over £1 million and will have significant effects on two or more electoral divisions.

Information

3. In October 2021, the Government launched Phase One of the Household Support Fund, which ended on 31 March 2022, and allocated £5,646,450 to the Council to allocate to those in immediate need in the County.
4. Further extensions to the fund were made with Phase Two covering 1 April 2022 to 30 September 2022 and Phase Three covering 1 October 2022 to 31 March 2023, each of the value of £5,646,450 with Phase Four of the fund covering 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024, with a value of £11,292,900.
5. Phase Five of the fund, covering the period 1 April 2024 to 30 September 2024 allocated a further £5,646,450 to support households in immediate need across the County.
6. On 2 September 2024 the Chancellor announced that the Household Support Fund would continue and a further Phase Six covering the period 1 September 2024 to 31 March 2025 with £5,646,450 being awarded to Nottinghamshire County Council.
7. Phase Six guidance, as with the previous Phases, places no specific requirements on the level of support across cohorts.

Summary of Phase Five

8. As with the previous three Phases of the fund, data was provided by the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) and Schools Census to identify those households in receipt of Pension Credits and Free School Meals to allow for targeted support to be provided to these cohorts.
9. The duration of the fund allowed for a one-off Summer Support Payment to be made to all eligible households from the fund.

10. Applicants to previous Phases of the fund were asked permission for Nottinghamshire County Council to retain their information for ease of providing support payments where possible at a later date. The retention of this information allowed for a more efficient method of delivering support in Phase Five, therefore reducing administrative costs.
11. Since the inception of the Household Support Fund, a Household Support Fund Partnership Steering Group (The Partnership) has been established with colleagues from within Nottinghamshire County Council, District and Borough Councils and other nominated professional bodies who are able to request support from the fund on behalf of individuals.
12. Residents were able to self-refer into the fund via the District and Borough Councils who asked a series of questions to determine eligibility.
13. The method of calculation of all payments continued to be made up of an energy support payment per household along with a food support payment per household member. This has been paid as a combined single payment.
14. Support payments were made to households via BACS transfers and voucher payments dependent on the residents favoured method.
15. Phase Five of the fund allowed £75,000 to be awarded to Citizens Advice for advice services to be provided.
16. Citizens Advice have reported that the funding provided the ability for holistic advice services across the County to those presenting with a negative household budget. This advice service supports financial resilience in the longer term for households presenting themselves as being in need of support.
17. Phase Five of the fund, as with Phases Three and Four, was also used to support Discretionary Housing Payments for all Districts and Borough Councils. A payment of £250,000 continued to provide assistance with housing costs, rent shortfall, rent deposits and rent in advance. This was all fully utilised and appreciated by the Districts and Borough Councils.
18. Over £300,000 of the fund was utilised to provide white goods, such as cookers and washing machines to over 700 households in Nottinghamshire. These requests for exceptional support were made through the network of professional referrers.
19. The demand for white goods was higher than predicted with the full allocated amount being utilised in the first three months of Phase Five.

Proposals for Phase Six

20. To ensure equity across all groups supported, it is proposed that the equivalent level of payment for all household cohorts continues as per Phases Three, Four and Five, with payments made on a per household basis.
21. Guidance from the DWP states that there should be intent to use the fund to provide continuous support throughout the duration of the funding period.
22. As with Phases Three, Four and Five of the fund, it is proposed that support is delivered as a single Support Payment to each household during December 2024.

23. The proposed groups/cohorts of households in immediate need to be supported from Phase Six are those households:
- a. In receipt of Benefits Related Free School Meals (including the 2-year entitlement for vulnerable children and where Early Years Pupil Premium is being paid to the setting/school).
 - b. With one or more people of pensionable age in receipt of, or eligible for, Pension Credit.
 - c. Where applications are made by professionals within The Partnership either reactively or proactively for any additional households identified as being in need of immediate support, particularly those households that are not eligible for other Government support with cost-of-living pressures (for example Energy Bills Support Schemes, Council Tax Rebate, Cost of Living Payments, £150 Disability Cost of Living Payment, or one-off £300 Pensioner Cost of Living Payment).
24. It is recognised the impact of the removal of Winter Fuel Payments by the Government for all pensioners who are not in receipt of Pension Credit. Whilst it is not possible to utilise Phase six of the fund to compensate for the removal of this payment for all pensioners, work is being undertaken with The Partnership to gather data of those who are not currently claiming Pension Credit but are eligible to do so, and to develop a communication strategy to drive uptake of this benefit, as well as applications to Phase 6 of the fund.
25. It is proposed that support for households in receipt of Pension Credit and Free School Meal eligible households be allocated funding support by utilising data provided by the DWP and Schools Census along with retained data from the previous phases.
26. Reactive support for households identifying themselves as being in need will be provided via a nominated professional within the network of referrers.
27. Previous phases of the fund allowed professionals who identified the need for white goods, such as washing machines and cookers, to be funded from the scheme, with delivery and installation included. It is proposed that this is increased in Phase Six to £400,000 based on the demand placed on this element of the fund in Phase Five.
28. It is proposed to continue financial support at the same level of £75,000 for Citizens Advice across the County to allow them to continue to provide advisory support to those in need.
29. The Household Support Fund was utilised to support the Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) provided by local District and Borough Councils who have found an increase in the number of requests for housing support when funding from Central Government has been reduced. It is proposed to continue this financial support of £250,000 during Phase Six.
30. The guidance from the DWP allows for reasonable administration costs to be paid from the fund. As with previous phases of the fund it is proposed that the Communities Early Help and Support Team manages the funding with costs incurred from the Partnership and Nottinghamshire County Council to be paid from the fund.
31. Due to the time constraints placed on the announcement of the extension of the fund, and to retain the skills and expertise of existing staff, contract extensions have been arranged within both the Communities Early Help and Support Team and the Business Support Team where possible. One member of the Communities Early Help and Support Team has now moved back to their substantive post, and work is ongoing to address this capacity gap.

Finance Summary

32. As with the previous funds, The Partnership has met to design the most effective systems by which support will be delivered to those in immediate need.
33. The Partnership Steering Group consists of professionals from Borough and District Councils and Nottinghamshire County Council and other partners such as the Department for Work and Pensions, who work in a range of frontline services.
34. After administration costs, and the sums for Discretionary Housing Payments, white goods and Advice Service payments are deducted; it is proposed that the remainder of the fund is divided between three cohorts –
- Households in receipt of free school meals
 - Those of pensionable age in receipt of or eligible for pension credit
 - Other households identified as being in immediate need who do not fall into the previous two cohorts, and who are not eligible for other Government support with cost-of-living pressures.
35. Where it is identified that cohorts from previous Phases have not claimed their support payment (via any means provided) then ongoing work is being undertaken to ensure that the those approved cohorts will receive financial support.
36. The values set out in the table below show an equal amount assigned to each of the above cohorts, and allocations will continue to be regularly reviewed and, where possible, provide additional support to those who have already applied from previous Phases or using data analysis to proactively identify other households in immediate need.

37.

Government Allocation to Nottinghamshire County Council	£5,646,450
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Phase Six Proposals

a. Those households in receipt of free school meals	
b. Those households with one or more people of pensionable age in receipt of pension credit	£1,523,816
	£1,523,816
c. Support for other Households identified as being in need of immediate support by The Partnership	£1,523,816
White Goods	£400,000
Discretionary Housing Payments	£250,000
Admin costs (including admin costs of the District and Boroughs)	£350,002
Citizens Advice Service Payment	£75,000

Total Proposed Spending in this Report

£5,646,450

Other Options Considered

38. To not utilise the Household Support Fund to provide support to residents in Nottinghamshire. This option would not provide support to those in need with cost-of-living pressures. The Government provide this funding to Local Authorities and not to provide this support in Nottinghamshire and returning any underspend to the Government is not considered as an option.
39. To change the method of delivering support. To change the approach which is similar to the previous Phases would lead to confusion for those accessing the Phase Six of the fund, both from an organisational and individual's perspective. Utilising previous learning from the past three years has meant that processes and working practices are well developed, data has been retained and systems are in place with partners to deliver the support in the most effective manner.

Reasons for Recommendations

40. To allow the Council to continue to work with a range of partners to deploy Government funding to those in immediate need in the County in a timely manner.
41. The Household Support Fund team and the Partnership have established processes in place in order to focus support to those in need and fully utilised Phase Six of the funding.

Statutory and Policy Implications

42. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of crime and disorder, data protection and information governance, finance, human resources, human rights, the NHS Constitution (public health services), the public sector equality duty, safeguarding of children and adults at risk, service users, smarter working, sustainability and the environment and where such implications are material they are described below. Appropriate consultation has been undertaken and advice sought on these issues as required.

Financial Implications

43. Paragraph 37 of this report sets out the financial implications of the decisions sought in this report.

Data Protection and Information Governance

44. The data received and held by the Household Support Fund Team has been approved by the Information Governance Team and a full DPIA has already been approved.

Public Sector Equality Duty implications

45. The proposals set out in this report will ensure that one third of the total funding available will be reserved and targeted towards older adults of pensionable age, that one third of the funding will be reserved and targeted towards households in receipt of free school meals, with the remainder of the fund being available and targeted to any household identified as being in need, regardless of the household make up or existing benefit provision.

46. The design of the scheme and delivery methods has been developed by The Partnership. Aside from the specific age considerations set out above, the Group does consider broader equality matters to ensure as far as possible the funding reaches and supports those in immediate need in all groups.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1) That the Cabinet Member approves the cohort criteria and allocation model for Phase Six of the Household Support Fund for the period 1 October 2024 to 31 March 2025 as set out in paragraph 37 of the report.
- 2) That the Cabinet Member endorses the continued involvement of the Nottinghamshire Household Support Fund Partnership Steering Group.
- 5) That the Cabinet Member agrees to receive progress reports of Phase Six of the scheme and any proposed changes with necessary approvals sought where appropriate.

Mark Walker
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For any enquiries about this report please contact: Paul Cannon., Team Manager Early Help and Support in the Community, 0115 9774929

Constitutional Comments (LPW 20/09/2024)

47. The recommendations fall within the remit of the Cabinet Member for Communities and Public Health by virtue of their terms of reference.

Financial Comments (PAA29 17/09/2024)

48. The financial implications are set out in paragraphs 32 to 37 of the report. The Household Support Fund Phase Six allocation for Nottinghamshire totals £5,646,450 and all expenditure incurred will be met from this sum. There are no additional costs to be met by the County Council.

HR Comments (JP 26/09/2024)

49. There are no specific HR implications arising from the report.

Background Papers and Published Documents

Except for previously published documents, which will be available elsewhere, the documents listed here will be available for inspection in accordance with Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972.

- [Household Support Fund Phase One Committee Report](#)
- [Household Support Fund Phase One Update Committee Report](#)
- [Household Support Fund Phase Two Cabinet Member Report](#)
- [Household Support Fund Phase Three Cabinet Member Report](#)
- [Household Support Fund Phase Four Cabinet Member Report](#)
- [Household Support Fund Phase Five Cabinet Member Report](#)
- [DWP Household Support Fund Guidance for Local Councils](#)

Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected

- All