

Key Decision Report: 10 May 2023**REPORT OF INTERIM SERVICE DIRECTOR, PLACE AND COMMUNITIES****HOUSEHOLD SUPPORT FUND – PHASE FOUR****Purpose of the Report**

1. To approve the allocation and launch of Phase Four of the Household Support Fund to support those in immediate need in Nottinghamshire from 1 April 2023 until 31 March 2024.
2. This is a Key Decision because it will result in expenditure of £1 million or over and it 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, both to the value of £5,646,450 with Phase Two of the fund covering 1 April 2022 – 30 September 2022, and Phase Three of the fund covering 1 October 2022 – 31 March 2023.
5. Phase Three of the fund has now concluded, and the total amount provided to Nottinghamshire County Council (NCC) has been spent.
6. Phase Four of the fund has been confirmed by the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) to cover a full year, starting from 1 April 2023, and concluding on 31 March 2024.
7. The value of the fund has been confirmed as £11,292,900.
8. Previous funds have defined the level of support for different cohorts, with Phase One requiring that at least 50% should be spent on Households with Children, and Phase Two requiring that at least one third should be spent on pensioner households alongside at least one third being spent on households with children. The Local Authority had discretion to apply the remainder of the balance to other households it deemed to be in immediate need. Guidance for Phase Three stipulated that it should reflect previous phases.
9. Phase Four, as with Phase Three, places no specific requirements on the level of support across cohorts.

Features of previous phases

10. Utilising learning from the three previous phases of the fund alongside data and intelligence held by NCC, Phase Four of the fund is designed to deliver support to those households in need.
11. Phase Three of the fund moved away from support directly linked with school holidays for those in receipt of Free School Meals, instead providing a Winter Support Payment.
12. An intelligence-led approach allowed the authority to deploy targeted support to pensioners in receipt of Pension Credit using data provided by DWP in Phases Two and Three of the fund.
13. Throughout all three previous phases of the fund, colleagues from internal Nottinghamshire County Council teams, District and Borough Councils, and other nominated professional bodies were able to request support from the fund for individuals.
14. For Phase Three a 'Self-Referral via District or Borough' method was introduced. Residents who were not proactively identified from datasets, but were in immediate need of support, could telephone their local District or Borough council to request to be assessed for support from the fund.
15. The value of the Winter Support Payments for Phase Three was the same across all cohorts, providing equality in support to all those identified as being eligible.
16. Phase Three of the fund was also used to support Discretionary Housing Payments for the District and Boroughs. This allowed those Councils to provide support to assist with housing costs, rent shortfall, rent deposits, and rent in advance. £210k was shared among the seven local councils to provide such support.
17. Another valuable feature of the support provided in Phase Three of the fund was the ability for professionals to request white goods for those in immediate need of them, such as washing machines and ovens.

Further Requirements for Applying Phase Four of the Fund

18. As required by Government, plans for deploying the fund need to be developed for approval by a Partnership Steering Group comprising Borough and District Council representatives. Such a group was convened for the First Phase of the Fund and has met throughout all phases of the scheme.
19. The expectation is that the fund should be used to support households in the most need – particularly those who may not be eligible for the other support government has recently made available, including the Cost-of-Living Payments and energy support.
20. The DWP has defined that an application process must be in place for the fund.

Proposals for Phase Four of the Fund

21. To ensure parity across all groups supported, it is proposed for Phase Four that an equivalent level of payment for all cohorts is continued, and that this is done on a per household basis.

22. Guidance from the DWP outlines that the funding must be distributed across the whole twelve-month period and where appropriate advice services should be provided.
23. It is proposed therefore that Phase Four of the fund be delivered in two separate tranches, providing a Summer Support Payment and then later in the year, a Winter Support Payment. To provide consistency across all eligible households, payments are made on a per household basis as opposed to a per person basis.
24. The proposed groups/cohorts of households in immediate need to be supported for Phase Four 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 issues (e.g. – 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).
25. It is proposed that support for Pension Credit and Free School Meal eligible households be given proactively by utilising data provided by the DWP and the Council's Schools Admissions Team, respectively.
26. It is proposed that the development of the criteria for the group c. listed above is discussed and agreed with the Partnership Steering Group and developed with County Council Financial Resilience Group colleagues who hold further intelligence and broader data that may allow more proactive targeting of specific areas or groups in immediate need.
27. Reactive support for individuals will therefore be available to those identifying themselves as being in need. This will be provided via a referral route from a nominated professional.
28. Support will also be targeted to people that do not fall within these categories by utilising the knowledge of professionals working with individuals across the county alongside broader data sets held within the County Council's Financial Resilience Group.
29. The Partnership Steering Group has identified the value in supporting Discretionary Housing Payments for 2023-24, due to an increase in households in need of housing support. It is therefore proposed to provide Summer and Winter support payments to the Districts and Boroughs to apply to their Discretionary Housing Fund. The districts would share a £250k payment per six-month period.
30. Phase Three of the fund saw high demand for White Goods Support, therefore the provision will be a key feature of Phase Four. Previous iterations of the fund have illustrated a high level of demand for this support alongside more specific requests to support other identified needs. It is proposed that £400k is utilised to provide white goods support and other essential household support.

31. Due to the duration of the fund, eligibility and demand is expected to fluctuate. Spending will be closely monitored throughout the duration of the fund and levels of support, if needed, will be increased.

Rationale of the Proposals

32. The proposals outlined take into account previous learning, government guidance as well as increasing demand for support with cost-of-living challenges.
33. Phase Three of the fund has been using data to deliver support to those of pensionable age and those households in receipt of Free School Meals, providing support based on household make up. To provide consistent support across all households, the same principles are proposed to be applied for all cohorts during Phase Four of the fund.
34. In Phase Three, those of pensionable age in receipt of pension credit were provided support based on the number of household members as a one-off payment which provided a set amount of support for both energy and food. It is proposed that this principle is replicated for all cohorts to unify the approach to support.
35. The need in communities for white goods such as washing machines and cookers was illustrated during Phase One and Phase Three of the fund. No white goods were supplied in Phase Two of the fund.
36. In Phase One £37,546 was spent on white goods. During Phase Three £170,367 has been spent on white goods, this is significantly more than Phase One due to better communication about the scheme and the current cost of living pressures. Based on this, it is anticipated that applications for White Goods during Phase Four will be at least double the amount from Phase Three due to its duration.
37. The Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) funding from Government has been reduced for all local district and borough councils. The contribution from the Household Support Fund will allow districts to continue to deliver the same level of support as they were able to prior to the funding reduction.
38. Feedback collected from the districts and boroughs regarding the DHP contribution payments for Phase Three confirms that 98% of the funding provided was utilised to provide housing support.

Finance Summary

39. As with the previous fund, the Nottinghamshire Household Support Fund Partnership Steering Group has met to design the most effective systems by which the support will be delivered to those in immediate need.
40. The Steering Group consists of professionals from Borough, Districts and County Council and partners such as the Department for Work and Pensions who work in a range of frontline services.
41. The steering group meets weekly to discuss the key features of the Household Support Fund, to define, plan, launch, control and monitor the performance of the fund. Constant monitoring will allow areas of any underspend to be identified and respond if the need arises.

42. After administration costs, and the sums for Discretionary Housing Payments and white goods support are deducted, it is proposed that 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, and
 - Other households identified as being in immediate need who do not fall into the previous two categories, and who are not eligible for other government support with cost-of-living issues.
43. Data from Phase Three of the fund identified approximately 18,000 households had children in receipt of Free School Meals. Approximately 15,000 pensioner households receiving or entitled to receive Pension Credit were identified.
44. The aim of the fund is to give a comparable level of support to all eligible households, depending on household make up, averaging £100 per household, for each seasonal payment.
45. The total value of Summer/Winter support payments available per household may increase if the level of applications is lower than predicted. The progress of the fund's expenditure will be closely monitored to ensure the entire amount is provided to those in need.
46. The values set out in the table below show an equal amount assigned to each of the cohorts. As take up from group 'C' was lower than expected during Phase Three, spend will therefore be constantly reviewed and, where possible, investigate the possibility of providing additional support to those who have already applied from all cohorts or using data analysis to proactively identify other households in immediate need.
47. Data used in this report is based on January 2023 figures and there will be fluctuations in the final numbers eligible for support.
48. Based on the administration costs incurred internally by Nottinghamshire County Council and the Council's partners including District and Borough Councils, it is proposed that an additional sum of £700k is approved and reserved to cover these costs.
49. The table below summarises the financial position of the proposals outlined above, the total amounts will be divided into two separate payments in Summer and Winter:

Government Allocation to Nottinghamshire	£11,292,900
Proposals	
	£
a. Those households in receipt of free school meals	£3,230,966
b. Those households with one or more people of pensionable age in receipt of pension credit	£3,230,966
c. Support for other Households identified as being in need of immediate support by the Partnership	£3,230,966
White Goods	£400,002

Discretionary Housing Payments	£500,000
Admin costs (NCC/District/Borough)	£700,000

Total Proposed Spending in this Report

£11,292,900

Other Options Considered

50. To not utilise the Household Support Fund to provide support to residents in Nottinghamshire. This option would reflect badly on Nottinghamshire County Council. The £11.3m of funding that is available is much needed for the residents of Nottinghamshire to ease the current cost of living pressures. Therefore, this option is not recommended.
51. To not take into account previous learning and procedures and create new processes for Phase Four of the fund. The Household Support Fund team, steering group, and the professionals within, have been able to learn from each of the previous three phases of the fund and have been able to improve the fund with each phase that has passed. To create new processes and procedures would take time, in an already time pressured project, and may not necessarily improve the fund. Residents have grown used to the way the fund operates and any major alterations would result in negative feedback.
52. The previous three phases of the fund have been used fully to provide support to those in immediate need in Nottinghamshire, therefore the operating model suits the known need.

Reasons for Recommendations

53. To allow the Council to work with a range of partners to deploy the government funding available to those in immediate need in the County as soon as is practical.
54. Data from previous phases of the fund suggests that we should expect approximately 18,000 Free School Meal Household applications, 16,000 Pensioner Household applications, 5,000 applications made by professional referral and 500 white goods applications for each tranche of Phase Four (Summer and Winter).
55. The Household Support Fund team, steering group, and the professionals within, have been able to learn from each of the previous three phases of the fund and have been able to improve the fund with each phase that has passed.

Statutory and Policy Implications

56. 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

57. Paragraph 49 of this report sets out the financial implications of the decisions sought in the report.

Public Sector Equality Duty Implications

58. 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.
59. The design of the scheme and delivery methods has been developed by the Partnership Steering Group. 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 approaches and the financial allocation of the Household Support Fund Phase 4 as set out in paragraph 49 of the report.
- 2) That the Cabinet Member approves that the Nottinghamshire Household Support Fund Partnership Steering Group implements the systems to provide support to those in immediate need of support.
- 3) That updates on the progress of the scheme or any proposed changes, be provided to the Cabinet Member with necessary approvals sought where appropriate.

Mark Walker

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For any enquiries about this report please contact:

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Constitutional Comments (CEH 27/04/2023)

60. The report and recommendations falls within the remit of the Cabinet Member Communities under their terms of reference.

Financial Comments (SES 26/04/2023)

61. The financial implications are set out in paragraph 49 of the report.
62. Nottinghamshire County Council is being allocated £11,292,900 as part of Phase 4 of the Household Support Fund.

Background Papers and Published Documents

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

Electoral Divisions and Members Affected

- All