

REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR, PLACE AND COMMUNITIES**NOTTINGHAMSHIRE HOUSEHOLD SUPPORT FUND****Purpose of the Report**

1. To update Committee on Nottinghamshire's allocation regarding the Household Support Fund, and to seek authority to develop and launch a Fund for Nottinghamshire based on discussions with key partners.

Information

2. In a recent announcement, the Government has allocated up to £5.6m to the County Council as the Upper Tier Local Authority to support those most in need this winter during the final stages of the economic recovery from the Covid Pandemic. The funding must be spent by the end of March 2022.
3. The funding is to provide to support those in immediate need primarily with food, energy, and water bills. It can also be used to support essential costs related to those items and (in exceptional cases of genuine emergency) to support housing costs. Full details of eligible and non-eligible spend are attached as **Appendix One**.
4. At least 50% total funding is ring-fenced to support households with children, with up to 50% can be used to other households genuinely in need of support.

Government Guidance

5. The draft guidance shared gives Councils the flexibility to identify vulnerable households in most need and apply their own discretion when identifying eligibility. It allows Councils to request applications for support, proactively identify households, or take a mixture of the two approaches.
6. Councils are encouraged to use a wide range of data and sources of information to identify and provide support to a broad cross section of vulnerable households.
7. County Councils are expected to work together with District Councils to provide support and ensure that the funding meets its objectives by identifying those most in need.
8. Councils need a clear rationale or documented policy/framework outlining the approach including how eligibility is defined and how households can access the support. It continues that Councils should review any existing approach and to have a strong rationale for their targeting so that funding is available to the households who most need it.

Progress So Far

9. Nottinghamshire has previously delivered similar schemes including the Covid Winter Grant Scheme and the Covid Local Support Grant. Both schemes were designed and delivered in partnership with District/Borough Council colleagues and were led by colleagues within Children's Services, under the auspices of the Children and Young People's Committee.
10. A report was taken to the Children and Young People's Committee on 1st November seeking to spend £2.3m of the Household Support Fund to provide vouchers to up to 27,500 children for each of the five weeks of school holidays between October and the end of March - [Children and Young People's Committee Report 1st Nov 21.](#)
11. Further, this report sought approval for the transfer of responsibility for the remainder of the Household Support Grant to the 'relevant Committee', subject to continued oversight by Children and Young People's Committee on decisions involving funding for children and young people.
12. The officer lead for design and delivery of the remaining funds has now been moved to the Group Manager, Trading Standards and Communities to have a single point of leadership in the Council for covid related funding.

Engagement with Partners

13. Building on previous schemes and in line with the guidance, County, Borough and District Council representatives met on the 27th October to discuss how the remaining funds should be deployed. Consensus was reached on the high-level design principles for the scheme given the timescales and previous learning.
14. The principles agreed were:
 - One scheme to cover all areas of the County.
 - The scheme to be promoted to local organisations and services to make assessed referrals in to, rather than being promoted to those in need.
 - The County Council (and potentially one appropriate specialised partner organisation) would receive and process applications to the scheme to ensure consistency, effective anti-fraud measures, and to allow the provision of monitoring information to the Government.
 - Frontline officers working for the County, Borough and District Councils (plus other relevant organisations) would use their knowledge and understanding of need to assess the needs of relevant residents, check eligibility and request financial support on the behalf of residents.
 - The County Council or appropriate specialist partner would process the applications, and vouchers would be used as far as possible to provide the needed support.
 - The primary focus of the eligibility criteria developed would be support for food, energy & water, and essentials linked to energy and water.
 - The criteria would not prioritise support for wider essentials, housing costs or white goods. An exceptions process would be designed, to include the use of a panel of partnership professionals to consider any applications made in exceptional circumstances under these headings; and
 - The Council would seek to utilise a trusted Voucher Scheme and an Energy Partner as key facilitators of the scheme.

15. Following this meeting officers have been working on developing more of the detail of the scheme, starting with the draft eligibility criteria.
16. Work was also undertaken to complete a high-level Delivery Plan for the Fund which was submitted to the Government on 29th October. The plan required the Council to predict the volume of awards and expenditure against eligible categories by the end of March, split between Families with Children and Families without Children.
17. A meeting to agree the final eligibility criteria with partners took place on 2nd November.

Approval to Proceed

18. Given the short timescales in which the funding needs to be delivered, this report has been brought to this Committee under the Council's Urgent Decision process.
19. Given the nature of the Fund, the links to other funds and work programmes that fall under the remit of the Communities Committee, it seems appropriate this Committee takes responsibility for the balance of the Household Support Fund that does not relate to provision of food in the holidays for those children entitled to Free School Meals.
20. It is therefore proposed in order to maximise the opportunity the funding offers to support the most in need in the County that the Committee authorises the detailed development of the scheme, and its launch by mid-November.
21. County Council officers will continue to develop the scheme in collaboration with key partners and colleagues including Procurement, Legal Services, and Internal Audit in line with the Government guidance issued.
22. It is proposed that the details of the Fund are brought to the next Communities Committee to formally ratify the approach and allow appropriate political oversight.

Other Options Considered

23. Bringing detailed proposals regarding the scheme to a future Committee before then launching it. This would allow a reduced time to allocate funds, and limit access to the fund for those most in need of support.

Reason for Recommendations

24. There is pressing needs for support in Communities that the money funding should be used to alleviate as soon as possible.

Statutory and Policy Implications

25. 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

26. £5.6m has been awarded to the Council, and £2.3m has already been committed at the Children and Young People's Committee on 1st November 2021, leaving £3.3m remaining.

RECOMMENDATIONS

That Committee approves:

- 1) That the Communities Committee provides oversight of the elements of the Household Support Fund not led by the Children and Young Person's Committee.
- 2) Further detailed development by officers of the Nottinghamshire Household Support Fund scheme, based on the principles set out above.
- 3) The launch of the scheme by mid-November, or as soon after as possible.
- 4) That a further report be brought to the Committee in December to ratify the confirmed scheme.

Derek Higton
Service Director, Place and Communities

For any enquiries about this report please contact: Mark Walker, Group Manager, Trading Standards and Communities, Tel: 0115 977 2173

Constitutional Comments (EKH 02/11/2021)

27. The report falls within the remit of Communities Committee. Given the urgent need to action and spend this grant funding given to the Council Officers will need to work with Finance colleagues to get the grant funding included within the Council's revenue budget and reported to the appropriate place in accordance with the Financial Regulations in due course.

Financial Comments (SES 02/11/2021)

28. The financial implications are set out in paragraph 26 of the report.

29. £5.6m has been awarded to the County, and £2.3m has already been committed at the Children and Young People's Committee on 1st November 2021, leaving £3.3m remaining to be spent.

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.

- None

Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected

- All

APPENDIX ONE – ELIGIBLE SPEND OF THE FUND

- Food. The Fund should primarily be used to provide support with food whether in kind or through vouchers or cash.
- Energy and water. The Fund should also primarily be used to support with energy bills for any form of fuel that is used for the purpose of domestic heating, cooking or lighting, including oil or portable gas cylinders. It can also be used to support with water bills including for drinking, washing, cooking, and sanitary purposes and sewerage.
- Essentials linked to energy and water. The Fund can be used to provide support with essentials linked to energy and water (including sanitary products, warm clothing, soap, blankets, boiler service/repair, purchase of equipment including fridges, freezers, ovens, etc.), in recognition that a range of costs may arise which directly affect a household's ability to afford or access food, energy and water.
- Wider essentials. The Fund can be used to support with wider essential needs not linked to energy and water should Authorities consider this appropriate in their area. These may include, but are not limited to, support with other bills including broadband or phone bills, clothing, and essential transport-related costs such as repairing a car, buying a bicycle or paying for fuel. This list is not exhaustive.
- Housing Costs. In exceptional cases of genuine emergency where existing housing support schemes do not meet this exceptional need, the Fund can be used to support housing costs. Where eligible, ongoing housing support for rent must be provided through the housing cost element of Universal Credit (UC) and Housing Benefit (HB) rather than the Household Support Fund. In addition, eligibility for Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs) must first be considered before emergency housing support is offered through the Household Support Fund. The Authority must also first consider whether the claimant is at statutory risk of homelessness and therefore owed a duty of support through the Homelessness Prevention Grant (HPG).
 - In exceptional cases of genuine emergency, households in receipt of HB, UC, or DHPs can still receive housing cost support through the Household Support Fund if it is deemed necessary by their Authority. However, the Fund should not be used to provide housing support on an ongoing basis or to support unsustainable tenancies.
 - Individuals in receipt of some other form of housing support could still qualify for the other elements of the Household Support Fund, such as food, energy, water, essentials linked to energy and water and wider essentials.
 - The Fund cannot be used to provide mortgage support, though homeowners could still qualify for the other elements of the Fund (such as food, energy, water, essentials linked to energy and water and wider essentials). Where a homeowner is having difficulty with their mortgage payments, they should contact their lender as soon as possible to discuss their circumstances as lenders will have a set procedure to assist.

- The Fund can exceptionally and in genuine emergency be used to provide support for historic rent arrears built up prior to an existing benefit claim for households already in receipt of Universal Credit and Housing Benefit. This is because these arrears are excluded from the criteria for Discretionary Housing Payments. However, support with rent arrears is not the primary intent of the fund and should not be the focus of spend.
- Reasonable administrative costs. This includes reasonable costs incurred administering the scheme. These include for example:
 - staff costs
 - advertising and publicity to raise awareness of the scheme
 - web page design
 - printing application forms
 - small IT changes, for example, to facilitate MI production
- Eligible spend does not include:
 - Advice services such as debt advice;
 - Mortgage costs.