

**Executive Member for Finance & Major  
Projects**

**24 March 2023**

Report of the Director Customer and Communities

**Household Support Fund April 2023 – March 2024**

**Summary**

1. This paper presents the Household Support Fund (HSF) scheme April 2023 – March 2024 to the Executive Member for Finance & Major Projects in consultation with the Executive Member for Housing & Safer Neighbourhoods for approval. The council's scheme details must be submitted to the Department for Work & Pensions (DWP) by 17<sup>th</sup> May 2023.

**Recommendations**

2. The Executive Member is asked to approve:
  - a) the council's HSF scheme April 2023 – March 24 (Annex A).
  - b) that any changes to the scheme that do not fundamentally alter the purpose be delegated to the Section 151 officer in consultation with the Executive Member for Finance & Performance.
  - c) the delegation of discretion to pay claims made within the broader scope of the scheme guidance as set out by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) (Annex B) to the Head of Customer & Exchequer Services.

*Reason: To provide financial support to the city's most financially vulnerable residents from April 2023 to March 2024 arising from the ongoing cost of living increases.*

**Background**

3. In October 2022, the Chancellor announced that as part of a number of measures to provide help with global inflationary challenges and

the significantly rising cost of living, the Household Support Fund (HSF) would be extended from 01 April 2023 to 31 March 2024.

4. On 8 February 2023 the DWP provided guidelines for the scheme and confirmed funding of £2,075,813 for York for the proposed twelve-month period. The previous three schemes have provided half of this amount for each relevant six-month period.
5. The government guidance (Annex B) follows a similar approach to the previous HSF scheme and rather than focussing on one specific vulnerable group, local authorities are being asked to provide support to a broad cross section of vulnerable households to prevent escalation of problems, including families with children of all ages, pensioners, unpaid carers, care leavers, and people with disabilities; particularly considering support for those vulnerable households who are ineligible for other government support with the cost of living. All schemes must have a discretionary application process for residents. This new scheme (Annex A) will provide direct payments to residents and importantly provides funding for other targeted groups and 'wraparound' support within communities.
6. The total funding including any administration costs for City of York Council is £2,075,813. The funding is paid retrospectively following the first management information return due by 21 June 2023, and all funding must be spent or committed by 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024.

## **HSF Scheme**

7. This is the sixth government scheme following the Winter Support Grants (WSG) from December 2020 to April 2021, the Local Covid Support Grant (LCSG) from April 2021 to September 2021, the initial HSF scheme October 2021 to March 2022, the second HSF Scheme April 2022 to 30<sup>th</sup> September 2022 and the third HSF scheme October 2022 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023.
8. The scheme allows as far as possible to mitigate the necessity for potentially qualifying customers to have to make a claim. This has been well received with the previous schemes and ensures support is distributed as fairly and widely as possible. As with previous schemes and as set out in the DWP guidance there is a discretionary scheme running until 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024 that any resident can apply to.

9. Funding will be distributed as efficiently as possible to families with children, and other vulnerable households in most need of support with food, energy, and water bills. This will be done via the following routes:

- Providing support to financially vulnerable working age households already identified through eligibility to Council Tax Support.
- Providing support to financially vulnerable foster carers and care-leavers.
- A discretionary means tested application route open to all other households in the city needing support.
- A specialist advice support worker to reach out into the community to target groups, those who are not digitally engaged or have other reasons why they are not aware or able to apply for financial support; provide support to apply where needed and information about other support which might be available.
- Provide direct support via food and fuel e-vouchers as part of advice and support provided by both CYC and VCS services, including Local Area Coordinators, Housing Management Officers, Citizens Advice York, Age UK, OCAV, York Carers Centre, Peasholme Charity and Family Wellbeing Service.
- Support and development of community hubs offering community food provision, Warm Places, and information to local communities.
- Support with additional energy efficiency measures identified as part of advice and support provided by York Energy Advice, where other funding is not available.
- Working with Community First Credit Union to pilot a scheme offering interest free loans to people who do not qualify for grant funding through this scheme or through other financial support schemes.

10. The HSF scheme is set out at Annex A and the financial support in summary at Table A below:

**Table A – Scheme**

<b>Spend</b>	<b>£</b>
4400 working age CTS claimants (2 x £185 Payments in June & Nov 2023)	1,628,000
Discretionary	200,000
Care leavers	25,000
Foster Carers	25,000
Food/Fuel Vouchers	47,813
Practical energy saving	10,000
Advice worker supporting community-based services and settings	40,000
Community food and warm places	40,000
Credit Union - Interest Free loans	10,000
Administration Costs	50,000
<b>TOTAL Cost</b>	<b>2,075,813</b>
<b>Budget</b>	<b>2,075,813</b>

11. The scheme is there to support those households in financial difficulties with food, fuel, and other utility bills. A resident does not have to be in receipt of DWP benefits to claim though the discretionary fund and each claim will be considered on its own merits. Any resident who does not qualify will be signposted to other support both internally and externally including the York Financial Assistance Scheme (YFAS). The HSF scheme will close on the 31 March 2024 or at the point the funds are exhausted.

## **Analysis**

12. The difference between this scheme and former HSF schemes is that it removes the restrictions on the percentage that can be spent on specific financially vulnerable groups. The new scheme also allows for funding to be allocated to advice and support with applying along with additional wraparound support to ensure that residents are claiming all financial welfare benefit support they are entitled to.
13. The community food and warm spaces allocation of £40,000 will repeat the grant scheme in place for this last winter which not only secured the sustainability of some venues as warm spaces but also as potential community hubs. This will help with a longer-term strategic approach for winter 23/24.
14. The aim is to have the scheme live by the end of April 2023, with the first direct payments to be paid in June before the summer holidays and November before the Christmas break.
15. Whilst the council will receive a little over £2m this is no more than in the previous schemes and is a very small amount of money in comparison to the ongoing and increasing financial pressures many households are facing. There is continuing support available through the York Financial Support Scheme (YFAS) and access to food/fuel vouchers as well as Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP).

## **Consultation**

16. This is a government scheme and there was no consultation with City of York Council on its design. There is, however, some latitude within the scheme on how it is delivered, and the council has consulted with its Advice York partners as part of the Equalities Impact Assessment (Annex C) on how it will be delivered. Key elements of the scheme have been discussed with the council's charity, voluntary and community sector partners (Advice York) and reflects their thoughts in terms of getting money to Households as quickly and simply as possible

## **Implications**

17.

### **Financial**

There are no financial implications as this is Government grant not council budget. The council does not receive new burdens funding in respect of this scheme but can take reasonable administration costs

that are reported through the management return. The council costs are estimated at £50k. The current scheme is planned to come in on budget, however based on past schemes not all direct payments are taken up so it is expected that there will be some funding available after the November direct payments that can be targeted at any new or arising pressures within the scope of the scheme or to buy further food and fuel vouchers.

### **Human Resources (HR)**

There are no HR implications that are not already covered in the finance implications.

### **Equalities**

An Equalities Impact Assessment attached at Annex C and the recruitment of an additional adviser will help to support those who may normally have difficulty accessing support. The scheme will impact positively on all those protected under the act with low incomes and particularly older and/or disabled residents, carers, and care leavers.

### **Legal**

The decisions in this report do not carry legal implications for the council, as the Council is effectively 'passporting' the funds from central government to affected individuals. As such, providing the approved scheme is implemented in accordance with Annex A, the Authority is acting within its discretion

### **Crime and Disorder, Information Technology and Property**

No implications

### **Risk Management**

18. The key risk associated with this paper relates to ensuring that the scheme is delivered within and up to the financial value of the Government grant received. This is managed by basing the scheme on existing data around vulnerable family numbers in the city and taking a prudent approach to the grant payments.

**Author responsible for the report:**

**Chief Officer responsible for the report:**

Paul Sanderson  
Income Manager

Pauline Stuchfield  
Director Customer and Communities

**Report  
Approved**

**Date  
14/03/  
23**

**Specialist Implications Officer(s):**

Debbie Mitchell – Chief Finance Officer

**Wards Affected:** *List wards or tick box to indicate all*

**All**

**For further information please contact the author of the report**

Background Papers:

**Annexes**

Annex A – HSF Scheme

Annex B – DWP Guidance

Annex C - EIA