

Report of the Director Customer and Communities

Household Support Fund

Summary

1. This paper presents the Household Support Fund (HSF) scheme to the Executive Member for Finance & Performance in consultation with the Executive Member for Housing & Safer Neighbourhoods for approval.

Recommendations

2. The Executive Member is asked to approve:
 - a) the council's HSF scheme (Annex A).
 - b) allocation of £20k in funding to fuel vouchers (Paragraph 9 and Annex A)
 - 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 through the winter 21/22 during the ongoing covid-19 pandemic.

Background

3. The Government announced on 7th October that a new Household Support Fund (HSF) grant will be made available to County Councils and Unitary Authorities in England to support those most in need this winter. This new grant will run from 06 October 2021 to 31 March 2022 and totals £500m nationally.

4. At least 50% of the total funding must be spent on families with children. In terms of type of support, the expectation is that the Household Support Fund should primarily be used to support households in the most need with food, energy and water bills. It can also be used to support households with essential costs related to those items and with wider essential costs. The Government guidance is set out at Annex B.
5. The total funding including any administration costs for City of York Council is £1.038m. The funding is paid retrospectively in January 2022 and April 2022 following management returns and all funding must be spent or committed by 31st March 2022.

HFS Scheme

6. This is the third government scheme following the Winter Support Grants (WSG) from December 2020 to April 2021 and the Local Covid Support Grant (LCSG) from April 2021 to September 2021. The scheme allows to as far as possible to mitigate the necessity for all potentially qualifying customers to have to make a claim. The previous scheme in which the council made LCSG grant payments directly to families with children claiming Council Tax Support (CTS) means that the relevant financial details including bank information is already held. This will allow automatic HSF payments to provide support. The scheme still requires that proper security checks are undertaken before making any payment.
7. The HFS scheme is set out at Annex A of this report and will facilitate support payments to all qualifying families experiencing financial difficulties. Whilst those families already identified will receive payment automatically any resident in the city can apply for support through the online application process. This includes families with or without children and whether a couple or a single person.
8. The scheme is there to support those with financial difficulties with food and support around heating and other utility bills. A resident does not have to be in receipt of DWP benefits to claim 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).

Analysis

9. The scheme has been discussed with the council's charity, voluntary and community sector partners (Advice York) and reflects their thoughts in terms of getting money to families as quickly and simply as possible. The scheme is similar to the one that North Yorkshire County Council are looking to implement in the neighbouring districts. In a change to the two previous schemes (Winter Support Grant & Local Covid Support Grant) and in line with North Yorkshire's Warm & Well scheme we are providing funding for fuel vouchers (£20k) which can be provided through our third sector partners and allows them to build on their advice to residents through provision of financial help with utility bills.

Consultation

10. This is a Government scheme and there was no consultation with City of York Council on its design other than through a post release webinar with the Department of Work & Pensions (DWP). 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. The council has also discussed the scheme with North Yorkshire County Council who will be delivering a similar scheme through neighbouring district councils to ensure that the approach does not diverge and create a postcode lottery of support.

Implications

11.

Financial

There are no financial implications as this is Government grant not council budget. Any risk around not spending the grant is outlined in Paragraph 12 below.

Human Resources (HR)

There are no HR implications.

Equalities

This report will impact on all communities equally. Equalities Impact Assessment attached at Annex C

Legal

No implications

Crime and Disorder, Information Technology and Property

No implications

Risk Management

12. 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. The scheme provides for a final payment of any residual funding to families at the end of March 2022 to ensure that no funding is returned to central government.

Author responsible for the report:

David Walker
Head of Customer &
Exchequer Services

Chief Officer responsible for the report:

Pauline Stuchfield
Director Customer and Communities

**Report
Approved**



Date 29/10/21

Specialist Implications Officer(s):

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