

Household Support Fund - Phase 4

Strategy & Resources Committee Thursday, 28 September 2023

Report of: Chief Finance Officer (Section 151)

Purpose: For Decision

Publication status: Unrestricted

Wards affected: All

The Government have launched a fourth phase of the Department for Work and Pension (DWP)'s Household Support Fund to provide financial support to vulnerable households for 2023/24 financial year. Where previous allocations have spanned 6 months over a summer or winter period, this phase covers the whole year and so the Council has discretion on when to release the funding.

Including Phase 4, the Council will have overseen the delivery of almost £1m of support funding.

As with previous phases, initial allocations were made to Unitary and County Councils. Surrey County Council have decided to distribute £3.8m of their £10.6m Phase 4 allocation to borough and district councils to enable local solutions that meet local requirements. TDC has been allocated £316k to distribute. On a like-for-like basis, this is a reduction on previous allocations. This report sets out decisions taken to date and the plans for the winter months.

This report supports the Council's priority of:

Supporting economic recovery in Tandridge

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Recommendations to Committee:

That:

- A. the launch (on 18th September 2023) of the first round of Household Support Grant (Phase 4) be noted; and
- B. the launch of the second round of Household Support Grant (Phase 4) be approved.

Reason for recommendations:

Funding for the Household Support Fund covers 2023/24. Local Authorities have discretion on how the funding is used within the scope set out in the guidance. The scheme is designed to provide support to vulnerable households with increasing bills.

In consultation with Group Leaders and under previously delegated powers, Officers decided to release 1/3rds (£105K) of the total to help individuals and families in financial difficulty following the summer months (particularly with increased costs associated with school holidays).

The remaining 2/3rds (£211k) of the grant has been retained for winter costs and is planned to release in December. This element has been brought to Committee to update and gain Member approval and to ensure wide visibility and publication of the scheme.

The Tandridge Household Support Fund Local Eligibility Framework sets out how the Council will distribute funding; this is attached in Appendix A.

Introduction and background

Surrey County Council have allocated Tandridge District Council £316k as its share of Household Support Fund Phase 4. This funding covers the whole 2023/24 financial year, where previous phases have covered 6 months at a time. The amount allocated is a reduction on previous phases when compared on a like-for-like basis. A table showing the allocation for each phase is set out below.

Phase	Dates	Committee	Total Surrey	District Share	Tandridge Share
Phase 1 6 months	October 2021 to March 2022	2 nd December 2021	£5.3m	£2.8m / 53%	£235k / 8%
Phase 2 6 months	April 2022 to September 2022	30 th June 2022 (included delegation to officers for future schemes)	£5.3m	£2.8m / 53%	£219k / 8%
Phase 3 6 months	October 2022 to March 2023	Informal engagement and decision under delegated powers	£5.3m	£2.2m / 42%	£187k / 8%
Phase 4 Full year	2023/24	28 th September 2023	£10.6m	£3.8m / 36%	£316k / 8% (£158k equivalent 6 monthly)

The reduction in the Council's allocation is a consequence of Surrey County Council reducing the share allocated to District and Borough Councils overall. TDC's share of the District and Borough Council allocation has remained static at 8%.

Authorities have discretion on how the funding is used within the scope of the guidance. The expectation is that it should primarily be used to support households in the most need with food, energy, water bills and other essential household costs.

Officers considered the scheme over June and July and consulted with Group Leaders in August. It was decided to run the scheme in two rounds, as follows:

Round 1 in September to recognise financial hardship over the summer (e.g. children home from school) and Round 2 in December to reflect additional winter costs (heating, lighting).

Round 1

- Launches 18th September – runs for c. 6 weeks to end of October, or until exhausted. Launches with 1/3rd of the total allocation (£105k)
- Advertised online and in CR3 and CR6.
- It was decided to delay Period 1 launch until September to ensure that there was opportunity to advertise in CR3 and CR6 to get at least some paper-based circulation.

Round 2

- Proposed to launch on 11th December and will run until exhausted. Launches with 2/3rd of the total allocation (£211k) plus any remainder from Round 1.
- Multiple advertising channels including online, social media, printed leaflets (distributed to libraries, GPs, community centres etc), CR3, CR6.

Communication and Support

Round 2 of the scheme will be publicised as follows:

- Website, social media and e-newsletters
- Leaflets to libraries, communities, GP surgeries and other venues
- Councillor distribution of leaflets where possible
- CR3, CR6
- Local Media
- Community groups

Members are asked to support in promoting the scheme.

In addition, Officers are discussing with community groups such as CAB and the Westway to ensure that they are aware of the scheme and eligibility criteria and can support individuals to apply.

Officers will be available through the Council's main telephone number to support residents with completion of the form where they require support with the online form.

Tandridge Household Support Local Eligibility Framework

A Tandridge Household Support Scheme Local Eligibility Framework has already developed and approved for previous phases the administration of the scheme and will therefore be used again. The Framework sets out how, in administering the scheme we will:

- Use discretion to identify and support those most in need.
- Use the funds to meet immediate needs and help those who are struggling to afford food, energy or water bills and essential household expenditure.
- In exceptional cases of genuine emergency, we will support housing costs where existing housing support schemes do not meet this exceptional need.
- Work with local services, community groups and other partners to identify and support households within the scope of the scheme.

A full copy of the scheme is attached in Appendix A. The changes to the scheme for this phase are as follows:

- Include a provision to allow funding to be distributed through other organisations: "Funding may also be channelled through charity, voluntary or third sector groups should they meet the aims and audit requirements of the programme. Decisions on funding such groups will be taken by the Chief Finance Officer (S151) in consultation with Group Leaders and will likely be an option if the main direct application route does not consume the allocation."
- Increase amounts from £100 to £150 for households without children and £300 to £350 for households with children, to recognise the impact of inflation since the first phase was launched.

Administration of the Tandridge Household Support Fund

Authorities are expected to keep administration costs to a reasonable level. The scheme allows for reasonable administration costs incurred in administering the scheme to be deducted from the grant allocation. These include:

- 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.

The costs of running all four phases of the scheme will fully be covered by a proportionate administrative deduction.

Key implications

Comments of the Chief Finance Officer

The Council can recover its reasonable costs in administering the scheme. Officers will need to continue to ensure that the scheme is administered in a manner which limits the cost to scheme whilst avoiding additional burden on the Council's limited resources.

Administration of the scheme needs to be undertaken in a way that takes proportionate steps to mitigate the risk of fraud, as set out in the Head of Legal Services' comments, below.

Comments of the Head of Legal Services

The funding provided under the Household Support Fund is required to be distributed by 31st March 2024 to support those most in need with the cost of food, energy, water bills and other essentials. The Household Support Fund must only be used to provide support as defined within the grant conditions.

To this end the Council is required to use a local eligibility framework and approach. Officers have set out a proposed approach as set out above and in the Appendix.

As with any welfare payment to vulnerable recipients there is a risk of fraud, as recipients might appear to be eligible when they are not. One of the biggest risks for this scheme is impersonation fraud, where fraudsters work through a residential area and falsely claim under the names of eligible recipients. Officers are encouraged to mitigate this risk, by ensuring checks are in place to verify the applicant's identity. The Council and its partners have access to a range of data sources and checks which can be carried out against this data to verify the identity of the recipient. It is for the Council to decide how payments are made to recipients. However, when making this decision the Council is encouraged to consider the risks involved.

Equality

In accordance with the public sector equality duty, DWP has had due regard for the potential equalities impacts of this grant.

In developing the Tandridge Household Support Local Eligibility Framework, Officers have ensured people are not disadvantaged or treated unfairly by this scheme. For example, the application process is easy to access and to navigate and support is available to assist anyone who needs help to apply.

Appendices

Appendix A - Tandridge Household Support Scheme Local Eligibility Framework

Background papers

None

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