

Household Support Fund - Confirmation of decision taken under urgency powers (Standing Order 35)

Strategy & Resources Committee Thursday, 2 December 2021

Report of: Executive Head of Communities

Purpose: For decision

Publication status: Open

Wards affected: All

Executive summary:

The Government (DWP) have launched the Household Support Fund to provide financial support to vulnerable households over the winter months.

Initial allocations were to Unitary and County Councils. Surrey County Council (SCC) received nearly £5.3m. SCC have decided to distribute £2.8m of their allocation to borough and district councils to enable local solutions that meet local requirements. TDC has been allocated £234,649.

The Tandridge Household Support Scheme Local Eligibility Framework has been developed for the administration of the scheme.

This report supports the Council's priority of:

Supporting economic recovery in Tandridge

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Recommendation to Committee:

That the decision taken under urgency powers in accordance with Standing Order 35 of the Constitution to approve the Tandridge Household Support Scheme Local Eligibility Framework be ratified.

Reason for recommendation:

Funding for the Household Support Fund covers the period 6 October 2021 to 31 March 2022. Local Authorities have discretion on how the funding is used within the scope set out in the guidance.

First tranche of the grant (50%) has been received. The scheme is designed to provide support to vulnerable households during the winter, so it is essential that the scheme is up and running and grants are being paid without undue delay.

The Tandridge Household Support Fund Local Eligibility Framework sets out how the Council will distribute funding within the Policy intent.

Introduction and background

- 1 On 1 October 2021 the Government (DWP) announced funding to target financial support for vulnerable households over the winter months to be known as the Household Support Fund (HSF). Initial allocations were to Unitary and County Councils. Surrey County Council (SCC) received nearly £5.3m.
- 2 SCC have decided to distribute £2.8m of their allocation to Borough and District Councils to enable local solutions that meet local requirements. TDC has been allocated £234,649.
- 3 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.

Tandridge Household Support Local Eligibility Framework

- 4 A Tandridge Housing Support Scheme Local Eligibility Framework has been developed for the administration of the scheme. 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.

Administration of the Tandridge Household Support Fund

- 5 Authorities are being 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

- 6 The administration costs are anticipated to be approximately £11,000 made up as follows:

Activity	No of Hours	Costs	Plus 30% On-cost
Set-up	40	£2,200	£2,920
IT development	22	£440	£836
Administration	20 hours per week X 20 weeks	£6,800	£14,000
Total		£9,440	£17,756

- 7 The scheme will be administered via salesforce case management by adapting the established process for administration of the Test and Trace Support Payments.
- 8 There will be an on-line form that can be completed by the applicant or their representative, or another agency. Additional support will be provided via the Customer Service Team for those applicants unable to access the on-line form.
- 9 Applications will be validated and checked, including identity checks. The Council has access to various data sources, including the DWP, for this.
- 10 The Council have engaged a supplier of a voucher scheme, so funds can be awarded in the form of vouchers. Vouchers can be issued for all main grocery suppliers, utility costs via pay point and other essential costs such as clothing and white goods. Vouchers are issued via a secure on-line system which reduces the administrative burden for the Council. The scheme is provided at no cost to the council over and above the cost at face value of the vouchers issued and redeemed.

Other options considered

- 11 Councils have discretion to deliver a scheme through a variety of routes including providing vouchers or financial awards, making direct provision of food or issuing grants to third parties.
- 12 Surrey County Council have distributed funds from their overall allocation to care leaver support, foodbanks, voluntary organisations and have enhanced their crisis fund offer. They have also allocated funds to provide food vouchers for children entitled to free school meals, including early years through school holidays.
- 13 It is believed that the Tandridge Household Support Local Eligibility Framework will enable the Council to identify and provide support to the broadest cross section of vulnerable households in the district.

Consultation

- 14 The Tandridge Household Support Local Eligibility Framework has been developed with regard to the Household Support Fund – Guidance for County Councils and Unitary Authorities.
- 15 The Urgency Decision relating to the approval of the scheme was taken by the Chief Executive in consultation with the Group Leaders and the Chair of Strategy and Resources Committee.

Key implications

Comments of the Chief Finance Officer

- 16 There is no impact of the Councils revenue budgets as the Council will receive a fixed amount of funding from Surrey County Council which will cover the Discretionary Scheme's period October 2021 to March 2022.
- 17 Administration costs cover initial officer's time to set up the criteria and process IT support to generate the application within Salesforce. Also, the officer's time processing the applications (unsuccessful and successful). On-cost support would cover IT storage and other associated cost especially processing individual payments and any queries arise from any application.
- 18 Surrey County Council has stated that the scheme will be available to 31 March 2022. The grant for the scheme is fixed and limited. The scheme will close before the 31 January 2021 if the funding is exhausted or any unutilised fund will be returned to Surrey County Council.

Comments of the Head of Legal Services

- 19 The funding provided under the Household Support Fund is required to be distributed by the 31st March 2022 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 develop a local eligibility framework and approach. The grant funding will be paid to the Council via Section 31 of the Local Government Act 2003

- 20 Officers have set out a proposed approach in the report and have received authority under the Chief Executive use of urgency power to establish such detailed criteria as may be necessary to enable appropriate allocation of funding.
- 21 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. Although vouchers still carry fraud risks, vouchers are preferred where possible as this helps to mitigate the risk of the money being spent by the recipient on things outside the policy intent, therefore undermining the purpose of the scheme.
- 22 Given the severity of hardship anticipated this winter and the lack of cost to the local taxpayer it is appropriate for the Council to introduce these measures to support our most vulnerable residents. To expedite matters, the Chief Executive was asked, using urgency powers under Standing Order 35 of the Constitution, to agree the the Council's approach to delivering the Household Support Grant.

Equality

- 23 In accordance with the public sector equality duty, DWP has had due regard for the potential equalities impacts of this grant.
- 24 In developing the Tandridge Household Support Local Eligibility Framework we 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.

Climate change

- 25 There are no significant environmental / sustainability implications associated with this report

Appendices

Appendix A – The Tandridge Household Support Local Eligibility Framework

Background papers

None

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