

## CABINET

7 March 2023

### HOUSEHOLD SUPPORT FUND POLICY

#### Report of the Portfolio Holder for Finance, Governance and Performance, Change and Transformation

Strategic Aim:	All	
Key Decision: Yes	Forward Plan Reference: FP/200123	
Exempt Information	No	
Cabinet Member(s) Responsible:	Councillor Karen Payne, Portfolio Holder for Finance, Governance and Performance, Change and Transformation	
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Ward Councillors	N/A	

#### DECISION RECOMMENDATIONS

That Cabinet:

1. Authorises the Director for Resources, in consultation with the Cabinet Member with portfolio for finance to finalise the Council's Household Support Fund Policy for 2023/24 and to make any further changes and finalise any future policies should the scheme continue beyond 2023/24.

#### 1 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 To seek approval from Cabinet for the Director for Resources in consultation with the Portfolio Holder with responsibility for finance to finalise the Council's policy in relation to the Household Support Fund and any future Fund should the scheme continue in future years.
- 1.2 The provision of delegated authority will allow the Council to finalise its policy and make any further amendments as required and to proceed to make targeted payments and invite applications from those in need. In the context of the cost of living crisis, the Council is eager to let residents know that support is available and to make awards as soon as possible.

## **2 BACKGROUND AND MAIN CONSIDERATIONS**

- 2.1 The Household Support Fund (HSF) was first introduced in 2021/22 and was extended through 2022/23 and has further been extended to 2023/24. The grant is being made available to County Councils and Unitary Authorities in England to support those most in need and struggling with the cost of living. The Council operated the HSF in 2021/22 and 2022/23 and has made payments of c£470k to households in need.
- 2.2 The Council has been not yet received its allocation for the financial year 2023/24 but expects an amount in the region of £130k - £160k. All funding must be spent or committed by the end of March 2024. No indication has been provided about any further funding beyond then, but it would be prudent to ensure delegation is in place to enable the Council to act swiftly if it is extended again.
- 2.3 The purpose of the grant has been to provide support to households with children, disabilities and pensioners, who would otherwise struggle to buy food or pay essential utility bills or meet other essential living costs. We expect the broad objectives of the grant in 2023/24 to be the same as those in 2022/23.
- 2.4 The conditions of each fund received to date have changed slightly. This means that each policy reflects the specific conditions set out by The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). For example: the revised grant condition for the scheme for 2022/23 set out that at least 33% of the grant must be used to support households that included a person who has reached state pension age.
- 2.5 The conditions also specify what the funding should be spent on. this includes food, energy (for heating, lighting and cooking), water and other essential living needs.

## **3 OUR EXPERIENCE AND LEARNING**

- 3.1 The Council has gained considerable experience in delivering support to the most vulnerable households during the pandemic, building on existing crisis support provision. It has used a combination of targeted support alongside an open application process for the previous HSF.
- 3.2 The provision of food vouchers to children eligible for free school meals to cover school holidays, provides directly targeted support to low-income households with children. This has been achieved through working in partnership with schools who have issued the vouchers. Supporting children is a key priority and this support has been well received. One change the Council did make was around putting in place reciprocal arrangements whereby children who live in Rutland and attend schools out of our county receive vouchers from their school if they are in receipt of free school meals in accordance with the Household Support Fund Policy for the relevant Local Authority.
- 3.3 The Council recognises that it holds data on those with low incomes. Using the fact that individuals already qualify for other support that indicates they are on low incomes has avoided the need to re-assess them again and has proved to be an effective means of delivering support to people in need quickly and efficiently thereby reducing the burden on those involved. The Council achieved this by inviting those on council tax support to sign up for additional funding through signing a simple declaration form thus allowing us to gather information regarding how awards may be spent.

3.4 However, the Council also understands that not all need can be met through using existing data and that there has to be other means for individuals to access support, particularly those who may be just above the threshold for benefits. The Council set up an application process and encouraged internal teams and external organisations to refer those who may be in need to apply. For the current scheme, which closes on 31 March 2023, we have received 38 applications from households who don't receive Council Tax Support and of these 23 have been awarded a payment to date.

#### 4 **OUTLINE POLICY**

4.1 The DWP issue guidance and local authorities have discretion on exactly how this fund is used within the scope set out in the guidance.

4.2 The Council intends to stick closely to its latest scheme but will make some small changes to meet the relevant guidance if necessary. The rationale for this is that any fundamental changes could see support withdrawn from those who have traditionally received it.

4.3 We will draft the full policy when guidance is issued but the outline plan is to target support as follows:

4.3.1 Firstly, families and individuals of school age children who attend a school or college in Rutland, will be provided with a food voucher, if they are currently eligible for free school meals. The vouchers will be issued via the child's school and will cover the periods in the table below. The voucher will be for a set amount per child, per break and will be paid as a voucher before the start of each term break.

<b>Term</b>	<b>*days</b>
Easter 2023	10 days
Spring half-term 2023	5 days
Summer 2023	28 days
October half-term 2023	10 days
Christmas 2023	10 days
February half-term 2024	5 days

\*these may be subject to change

4.3.2 Secondly, the Council will provide a Post Office voucher to households that meet the eligibly criteria, the exact details are to be determined but is likely to include:

- Be a household living in Rutland on a specific date;
- Be in receipt of Local Council Tax Support; and
- Have savings of less than £5,000.

4.4 Thirdly, the Council will make a one-off payment to care leavers. The payment will be organised in conjunction with their allocated Personal Adviser.

4.4.1 Lastly, the Council will run an application process to invite households to apply for a payment if they were not identified as being eligible for a payment in categories 1, 2

and 3 and can demonstrate that they have extenuating circumstances. The following are examples of circumstances that would be considered for an award:

- A member of the household had a long term health condition. E.g. someone needs home oxygen therapy which is dependent on using a constant supply of fuel to operate
- The household is large and has higher energy bills e.g. 5+ people
- The property is not energy efficient e.g. lack of double glazing, not on dual fuel or not on mains supply, has an EPC band F or G rating
- Households that are on a low income but just above the threshold to claim state benefits such as Universal Credit

4.4.2 In running the scheme we will seek to maximise publicity and engage with internal teams and external organisations e.g. Citizens Advice Bureau to achieve maximum applications.

4.4.3 It is anticipated that awards will be in the region of £80-100 but this will be confirmed when funding is known.

## **5 CONSULTATION**

5.1 Formal consultation is not required for any decisions being sought in this report. Internal consultation has been undertaken with officers and the schemes were discussed at a Director briefing with elected members where different options were considered.

## **6 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS**

6.1 Cabinet is requested to give delegated authority. It could refuse this and ask for the full policy. This is not advised as the key part of the policy (target groups) are covered above.

6.2 Cabinet could also seek to direct awards to groups or individuals not identified in the outline proposals above. For example, some Councils have set funds aside specifically for armed forces veterans. The Council has made provision in its scheme to allow applications from these groups rather than target them directly.

6.3 Another option would be to go down an application route for all awards as some Councils are doing. This is not recommended. It places a significant burden on those applying (full disclosure of all income, expenditure and assets would be required), it would be difficult to administer and would take longer to make awards.

## **7 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

7.1 The Council is receiving funds to meet scheme payments and can use some of the funding for administration costs so there is no General Fund impact. 10% of the funding allocation will be set aside towards administration costs which will go towards software costs and costs of using the Post Office. Additional staff resource may be brought in, but this is unlikely.

## **8 LEGAL AND GOVERNANCE CONSIDERATIONS**

8.1 The matters in this report are for the Executive to consider in line with the Constitution and the Executive can choose to delegate to an Officer and/or Portfolio Holder as required.

## **9 DATA PROTECTION IMPLICATIONS**

- 9.1 A Data Protection Impact Assessments (DPIA) has not been completed as there are no significant risks/issues to the rights and freedoms of natural persons.

## **10 EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

- 10.1 An Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) screening has been completed and there are no issues arising.

## **11 COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS**

- 11.1 There are no community safety implications.

## **12 HEALTH AND WELLBEING IMPLICATIONS**

- 12.1 There are no direct health and wellbeing implications but indirectly there may be implications for those on low incomes who are struggling to either buy food or pay bills etc. The Council's approach seeks to support individuals as much as we can.

## **13 CONCLUSION AND SUMMARY OF REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 13.1 The report updates Cabinet and all members on the HSF and how the Council intends to use them.

## **14 BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- 14.1 There are no background papers.

## **15 APPENDICES**

- 15.1 There are no appendices.

A Large Print Version of this Report is available upon request – Contact 01572 722577.