

EXECUTIVE BOARD DECISION



REPORT OF: Executive Member for Finance and Governance

LEAD OFFICER: Director of Finance

DATE: 11th November 2021

PORTFOLIOS AFFECTED: All

WARDS AFFECTED: All

KEY DECISION: Y

TITLE OF REPORT: Household Support Fund

1. PURPOSE

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek agreement from the Executive Board to the proposed distribution of the Household Support Fund (HSF).

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 It is recommended that the Executive Board:-
- a) agree to the distribution of the Household Support Fund as set out in the report;
 - b) give delegated authority to the Director of Finance, in consultation with the Executive Member for Finance and Governance, to determine a scheme of targeting financial support for recipients of Council Tax Support using the HSF allocation.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 At the beginning of October 2021, the Government announced that a new HSF worth over £500m would be made available to Upper Tier Local Authorities to support those households most in need over the coming winter.
- 3.2 Details of the grant allocations and supporting information on how the grant should be used were released to Councils on 7th October 2021. **The allocation for Blackburn with Darwen is £1.619m of which 50% must be spent on families with children.**
- 3.3 This is a new scheme and unlike previous schemes of this nature, the Household Support Fund can be used on a much broader range of household-related costs. The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) have indicated that it is not their intention to provide a definitive list of areas that Councils must provide support for; it is for Councils to use their discretion.

- 3.4 The grant funding must be used by 31st March 2022 (although there is an implicit acknowledgement from DWP that funds committed by that date can be defrayed after the end of the financial year should that be necessary).

4. RATIONALE

- 4.1 The distribution of the Household Support Fund is intended to provide much needed support to those households most in need over the winter period.

5. KEY ISSUES

- 5.1 Guidance on the use of the Housing Support Fund was released with the grant allocations on 7th October 2021. The objective of the Fund is provide support to vulnerable households in most need of support over the coming winter as the economy recovers. In doing so, Councils are required to develop a 'local eligibility framework and approach' to enable the distribution that ensures at least 50% of the funding is for vulnerable households with children. The remainder of the funding is available for vulnerable households without children (including individuals).
- 5.2 Within the context of this overriding objective, when administering the Scheme, Councils are encouraged to adopt the following principles:
- use discretion on how to identify and support those most in need, taking into account a wide range of information;
 - use the funding from 6 October 2021 to 31 March 2022 to meet immediate needs and help those who are struggling to afford food, energy and water bills, and other related essentials. It can also be used to support households who are struggling to afford wider essentials;
 - in exceptional cases of genuine emergency, it can additionally be used to support housing costs where existing housing support schemes do not meet this exceptional need;
 - this includes payments made, or committed to, by the Authority or any person acting on behalf of the Authority, from 6 October 2021 to 31 March 2022. For example, this would allow any vouchers issued before the end of the funding period to be redeemed in April 2022. All authorities are encouraged to ensure that any vouchers issued are redeemed before the end of the scheme, or shortly thereafter, or consider recycling unused vouchers;
 - Councils have the flexibility to work with multiple organisations to provide a local delivery network that supports vulnerable households with a broad range of support;
 - Council can claim for reasonable administrative costs incurred in administering the Scheme;
- 5.3 The Council has a good track record of developing and implementing welfare support schemes like the HSF; in recent times, and in response specifically to the impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic, much needed support has been delivered using both the Winter Grant and the Covid Local Support Grant Fund, with the former providing support to over 30,000 individuals.

- 5.4 Building on the frameworks that have been used for both the delivery of the Winter Grant and the Covid Local Support Grant Fund, it is proposed to use the HSF in the following way:-

Area of Support	£m
Provision of Free School Meal (FSM) Vouchers for School Holidays (in October 2020, 1 week at Christmas (with 1 week funded by the Holiday Activity Fund Scheme), February 2022 and Easter Holidays 2022)	0.380
Targeted Council Tax Support for households that have been impacted by Covid-19	0.381
Support for food, utility bills, white goods, boiler servicing and repairs etc delivered in partnership with the Help Hub and the Covid	0.781
Administration (FSM Vouchers, Administrative Support to VCFS)	0.077
Total Household Support Fund	1.619

- 5.5 The Executive Board should note that the allocation of funding for targeted Council Tax Support for households is subject to the development of a scheme for this purposes. In this respect, agreement is sought for delegated authority to the Director of Finance, in consultation with the Executive Member for Finance and Governance, to develop the scheme which will focus on those affected by Covid-19.
- 5.6 By taking this whole systems, partnership and strength based approach with the HSF, the Council will have the opportunity to reach some of the most vulnerable households in the community thereby complying with the objectives of the Scheme.
- 5.7 As ever with these types of grant allocations, the Council is required to provide the DWP with statements on the use of the grant and arrangements are in place to satisfy this requirement.

6. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 There are no policy implications arising directly from this report.

7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 The Council will receive a grant of £1.619m from the Household Support Fund. Details of the proposed distribution of the funding are as set out in the report.

8. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 There are no legal implications arising directly from the contents of this report.

- 8.2 This report is to be considered under Rule 15 of the Council's Procedure Rules relating to Access to Information and Decisions and Attendance at Public Meetings (Constitution, Part 4, section 2) insofar as it has not been possible to give the normal 28 days notice of this item on the Council's Forward Plan. This is due to timing of the notification of the funding and the need to put in place a plan to distribute the funding promptly.

9. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 There are no other resources implications arising from the contents of this report.

10. EQUALITY AND HEALTH IMPLICATIONS

Please select one of the options below.

Option 1 ☒ Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) not required – the EIA checklist has been completed.

Option 2 ☐ In determining this matter the Executive Member needs to consider the EIA associated with this item in advance of making the decision.

Option 3 ☐ In determining this matter the Executive Board Members need to consider the EIA associated with this item in advance of making the decision.

11. CONSULTATIONS

12. STATEMENT OF COMPLIANCE

The recommendations are made further to advice from the Monitoring Officer and the Section 151 Officer has confirmed that they do not incur unlawful expenditure. They are also compliant with equality legislation and an equality analysis and impact assessment has been considered. The recommendations reflect the core principles of good governance set out in the Council's Code of Corporate Governance.

13. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

All Declarations of Interest of any Executive Member consulted and note of any dispensation granted by the Chief Executive will be recorded in the Summary of Decisions published on the day following the meeting.

CONTACT OFFICER:	Dean Langton dean.langton@blackburn.gov.uk
DATE:	26 th October 2021
BACKGROUND PAPERS:	