



# EXECUTIVE BOARD DECISION

<b>REPORT OF:</b>	Executive Member for Public Health, Prevention & Wellbeing
<b>LEAD OFFICERS:</b>	Strategic Director of Adults and Health
<b>DATE:</b>	Thursday, 9 March 2023

<b>PORTFOLIO/S AFFECTED:</b>	Public Health Prevention and Wellbeing
<b>WARD/S AFFECTED:</b>	(All Wards);
<b>KEY DECISION:</b>	N

## SUBJECT: EB Household Support Fund Round 4

### 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 In November 2022, via the Chancellor's Autumn statement, the Government announced an extension to the Household Support Fund (HSF) from April 2023 to continue supporting communities who are struggling due to the cost of living crisis. The announcement was of a 12 month support package to the same value as spent in the previous 12 months of Household Support (£1b).
- 1.2 The Council has successfully delivered the HSF since October 2021 in partnership with a range of voluntary, community and faith sector organisations who work together to provide a strength based approach to support our residents.
- 1.3 The primary purpose of this report seeks approval for the ongoing delivery of the HSF grant programme as described in the body of the report. The secondary purpose is to seek approval to use an element of the 2022 /2023 ( Round 3) HSF to support a Schools Grant proposal ensuring children living in low income families are supported to access a hot meal.

### 2. RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Executive Board:

- 2.1 Agree to the distribution of the Household Support Fund Round 4 as set out in the report and subject to confirmation of the grant funding.
- 2.2 Give delegated authority to the Director of Finance and the Director of Adults and Health, in consultation with the Executive Member for Public Health, Prevention and Wellbeing, to amend the grant criteria should that be considered necessary given guidance from Government and local circumstances.
- 2.3 Approve the proposals for utilising remaining resources within HSF 3 relating to 2022/23 and in relation to funding the school meal support provision for the period the money is available.

### **3. BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 At the beginning of October 2021, the Government announced a new HSF worth over £500m would be made available to Upper Tier Local Authorities to support those households most in need over the winter period to March 2022.
- 3.2 Details of the grant allocations and supporting information on how the grant should be used were released to Councils on 7<sup>th</sup> October 2021 and a report on this matter was considered by the Executive in November 2021 where the distribution of the fund was agreed. Blackburn with Darwen Council received £1.619m and at the close of the scheme on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2022, all of the funding had been used as planned.
- 3.3 As part of the Spring statement 2022, the Government announced an extension to the HSF by providing a further £500m for the scheme as part of a package of measures to support those affected by the rising cost of living. The Council's share of this additional funding was £1.619m and the grant funding had to be used by 30<sup>th</sup> September 2022.
- 3.4 As part of the Chancellors' cost of living statement on 26<sup>th</sup> May 2022, the Government announced a further extension of the HSF from 1<sup>st</sup> October 2022. Again, this grant funding had to be used by 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023 and the Council received a further £1.619m as part of the £500m scheme.
- 3.5 As part of the Chancellor's Autumn statement on the 17<sup>th</sup> November 2022, the Government announced a further £1b nationally to extend the HSF for a further 12 months. This grant funding must be used by 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024. On the 20<sup>th</sup> February 2023 the Council received confirmation that a further £3.238m had been allocated to BwD as part of the £1b scheme. This equates to the same level of funding as previously received but covers a 12 month period rather than the 6 month periods of the previous schemes.

### **4. KEY ISSUES & RISKS**

- 4.1 The original objective of the Fund was to provide support to vulnerable households in most need of support over the winter period as the economy recovers. It has been recognised that further support is required to support communities as the cost of living crisis begins to impact further beyond recovery from the pandemic.
- 4.2 Councils have been required to develop a 'local eligibility framework and approach' to enable the distribution of the grant funding. In HSF1 at least 50% of the funding was for vulnerable households with children. The remainder of the funding was available for vulnerable households without children (including individuals).
- 4.3 For Round 2, there was a change in how the fund should be targeted. At least one third of the total funding is ring-fenced to support households with children, at least one third of the total funding is ring fenced to support pensioners with up to one third of the total funding to other households genuinely in need of support. This may include households not currently in receipt of DWP welfare benefits.
- 4.4 For Round 3, there was another change in how the fund should be targeted. With those on means tested benefits having received additional cost of living support through other means and grants, a focus was placed on those that had not received any previous cost of living support, resulting in those on means tested benefits not being eligible and funds being targeted towards those low income earners.

4.5 Guidance on the use of the Housing Support Fund Round 4 has not yet been issued by the Department of Work and Pensions. Whilst there may be some amendments to the eligibility criteria for HSF4, it is unlikely there will be any other significant changes to the grant conditions. When administering the Scheme during the first three rounds, Councils have been 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 1st April 2023 to 31st March 2024 to meet immediate needs and help those who are struggling to afford energy, food 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 1st April 2023 to 31st March 2024. For example, this would allow any vouchers issued before the end of the funding period to be redeemed in April 2024. 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;
- Councils can claim for reasonable administrative costs incurred in administering the Scheme;

4.6 The Council has a demonstrable track record of developing and implementing welfare support schemes and the delivery of Round 1 of the HSF is an illustration of this. Over 24,000 households have been supported through a range of measures including, for example, support with energy bills, Council Tax, provision of food and, as part of the wraparound service, advice and guidance in areas such as debt management.

4.7 Based on the criteria and funding allocation for Round 4 remaining broadly the same as Rounds 1, 2 and 3 and building on the frameworks that have been used for delivery to date and also recognising that the rising costs of energy will continue to be the most acute pressure faced by local residents over the next twelve months, it is proposed to use the HSF in the following way:-

TABLE

Area of Support	£m
Support for Energy Bills, food partnership (including crisis, food larder and community center support), white good provision and any other reasonable Cost of Living support schemes	2.848
Housing Need Community Care Grant	0.05
Contributions to Voluntary, Community and Faith Sector (BwD Homestart, Age UK, and BwD Carers)	0.06
Costs of Administering the Scheme	0.28

**Total Household Support Fund****3.238**

4.8 Again, as with HSF Rounds 1, 2 and 3, by taking this whole systems, partnership and strength based approach with the HSF4, 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.

4.9 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.

4.10 The delivery of the HSF will continue alongside other support including developing employability skills, debt, benefit and housing advice and mental health and wellbeing advice and support alongside supporting food larders as part of a plan for sustainability beyond the HSF grant.

4.11 Resources remain from the HSF 3 allocation for 2022/23 in the region of £645k. Adhering to the conditions of the grant, it is proposed a significant proportion of this remaining balance is directed to schools within the borough to extend the free school meal offer where possible or to support families who are experiencing food poverty or insecurity in other ways, as deemed appropriate. The cumulative total for this approach identified is up to £420,000 with £370,000 identified to be funded from HSF. In parallel there will continue to be commitment to promoting the availability of the fund to Blackburn with Darwen citizens and as such a degree of flexibility over the precise funding routes will emerge during March 2023.

4.12 Appendix 1 provides further detail on the model which has been developed to best identify how to distribute funding equitably to pupils in the greatest need within the borough. Outputs from the funding will vary depending on what activity each school proposes to support. If schools proposed to use the funding for additional Free School meals, this would provide 171,428 meals (at £2.45 per meal) or feed 2,678 additional children throughout the summer term at no cost (64 days, 17<sup>th</sup> April to 21<sup>st</sup> July). The position over the summer school holidays will be factored into plan.

**5. POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

5.1 There are no policy implications arising directly from this report

**6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

6.1 The Council is expected to receive a grant of £3.238m from the Household Support Fund. Details of the proposed distribution of the funding are as set out in the report.

**7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

7.1 Although there are no legal implications arising directly from the contents of this report, the Local Authority must act in accordance with the Government's guidance on the HSF and comply with its requirements (e.g. submitting the required statements of grant usage and MI returns). Therefore, there will need to be adequate systems in place for all decision making and recording of allocations to ensure that funds are distributed in accordance with the funding criteria and compliance requirements are satisfied, in order to avoid any claw back.

## 8. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

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

## 9. EQUALITY AND HEALTH IMPLICATIONS

Please select one of the options below. Where appropriate please include the hyperlink to the EIA.

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. *(insert EIA link here)*

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. *(insert EIA attachment)*

## 10. CONSULTATIONS

None arising from the contents of this report

## 11. 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.

## 12. 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.

<b>VERSION:</b>	<b>2</b>
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<b>CONTACT OFFICER:</b>	<b>Andrew Haythornthwaite, Leanne Reid</b>
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<b>DATE:</b>	23/01/2023
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<b>BACKGROUND PAPER:</b>	
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