



# EXECUTIVE BOARD DECISION

<b>REPORT OF:</b>	Executive Member for Housing & Public Health
<b>LEAD OFFICERS:</b>	Strategic Director of Adults and Health
<b>DATE:</b>	Thursday, 13 June 2024

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

**SUBJECT: Household Support Fund Round 5**

## 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 In March 2024, via the Chancellor's Spring statement, the Government announced an extension to the Household Support Fund (HSF) from April 2024 to continue supporting communities who are struggling due to the cost-of-living crisis. The announcement was of a 6-month support package to the same level as spent in the previous 12 months of Household Support (£1b), but pro rata for the 6-month period.
- 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 (in line with BwD's delivery plan, attached as Appendix 1) to continue to use a large element of the 2024 (Round 5) HSF to extend the Schools Food Grant offer of the remaining 2023/24 term, 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 5 as set out in the report, and in BwD's delivery plan (submitted to DWP in May 2024 as required).
- 2.2 Give delegated authority to the Strategic Director Finance and Resources and the Strategic Director of Adults and Health, in consultation with the Executive Member for Public Health, Prevention and Wellbeing, to amend the distribution of the grant should that be considered necessary given

guidance from Government and local circumstances (after having engaged with DWP regarding the Council's revisiting of its Delivery Plan during the Fund Period, as required by national guidance).

### **3. BACKGROUND**

3.1 At the beginning of October 2021, the Government announced a new HSF (round 1) 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 7th 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 31st 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 (round 2) 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 30th September 2022.

3.4 As part of the Chancellors' cost of living statement on 26th May 2022, the Government announced a further extension of the HSF (round 3) from 1st October 2022. Again, this grant funding had to be used by 31st 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 17th of November 2022, the Government announced a further £1b nationally to extend the HSF for a further 12 months (round 4). This grant funding must be used by 31st March 2024. On the 20th of 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.

3.6 As part of the Chancellor's Spring statement on the 6<sup>th</sup> of March 2024, the Government announced a further extension to the Household Support Fund (round 5), from 1st April 2024. The grant funding is to be used by 31st September 2024 with the Council receiving a further £1.619m.

### **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 and 5 significantly moved towards local authorities using their own intelligence needs to target the support, but in line with the following principles:

- Use discretion on how to identify and support those most in need, considering a wide range of information.
- Use the funding 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.
- 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 the previous 4 rounds of Household Support is an illustration of this. 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 The grant will be utilised based on the criteria and building on the frameworks that have been used for delivery to date. Details of eligibility criteria, types of support and the application process are set out on the council's Household Support Fund webpage (<https://www.blackburn.gov.uk/cost-living-support/household-support-fund>). It will continue to focus on the most acute pressures faced by residents over the next twelve months, it is proposed to use the HSF in the following way (a more detailed breakdown can be seen in the Delivery Plan): -

Categories	£m
Financial support to residents and schools including support for; energy bills, food and hygiene provision, household items and other reasonable cost of living support needs	1.519
Costs of the administrating the scheme	0.1

4.8 As with previous HSF rounds, by taking a whole system, partnership, and strength-based approach with the round 5, 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 round 5 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 and exit plan for when the HSF ceases.

## 5. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

5.1 There are no policy implications arising directly from this report

## 6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1 The Council has been allocated £1.619m from Round 5 of 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, to avoid any claw back and minimise the risk of fraud.

## 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>1</b>
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<b>CONTACT OFFICER:</b>	<b>Andrew Haythornthwaite</b>
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<b>DATE:</b>	26/04/2024
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<b>BACKGROUND PAPER:</b>	Appendix 1 – BwD Household Support Fund Delivery Plan May 2024
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