


Report to:	Cabinet		
Date of meeting:	17 th April 2023		
Report of:	Lee Fallows Director of Corporate Resources	Report Number:	
Reporting Officer:	Phil Rimmer Assistant Director Revenues, Benefits and Customer Services	Telephone Number:	01204 331541
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Report title:	Household Support Fund, 1 st April 2023 to 31 st March 2024, and Bolton's Response to cost of living increases		
Not confidential			
This report does not contain information which warrants its consideration in the absence of the press or members of the public.			
Purpose:	To seek approval on expenditure proposals relating to the Household Support Fund covering the period 1 st April 2023 to 31 st March 2024.		
Recommendations:	Cabinet is recommended to approve the proposals		
Decision:	N/A		
Background documents:	 FINAL Household Support Fund (2023-24)		
Consultation with other officers			
Finance	Yes	23 03 23	Katherine Roscoe
Legal	Yes	23 03 23	Helen Gorman
HR	No	Insert date	
Procurement	No	Insert date	
Climate Change	No	Insert date	
Equality Impact Assessment	Yes	27.03.23	Rebecca Albrow
(a) Pre-consultation reports Is there a need to consult on the proposals?			No
(b) Post consultation reports Please confirm that the consultation response has been taken into consideration in making the recommendations.			No

Vision outcomes Please identify the appropriate Vision outcome(s) that this report relates or contributes to by putting a cross in the relevant box.	1. Start Well	X
	2. Live Well	X
	3. Age Well	X
	4. Prosperous	
	5. Clean and Green	
	6. Strong and Distinctive	

1. INTRODUCTION & BACKGROUND

- 1.1. The Government, via the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), has recently announced £842 million has been made available to County Councils and Unitary Authorities in England to support those most in need in the financial year 2023/24.
- 1.2. This funding covers the period 1st April 2023 to 31st March 2024 inclusive. Local Authorities have discretion on exactly how this funding is used within the scope set out in this guidance and the accompanying grant determination. Energy bills may of particular concern to low-income households during the period of the scheme and Local Authorities should especially consider how they can support households with food and the cost of energy. It can also be used to support households with essential costs related to energy and with wider essential costs.
- 1.3. 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. The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) is providing funding to County Councils and Unitary Authorities (including Metropolitan Councils and London Boroughs), under section 31 of the Local Government Act 2003, to administer the scheme and provide assistance to households most in need. It is important to stress this covers a wide range of low-income households, particularly those that cannot increase their income through work, to prevent escalation of problems.
- 1.4. Authorities can deliver the scheme through a variety of routes including providing vouchers to households, making direct provision of food, or issuing grants to third parties. The DWP considers that Local Authorities have the local ties and knowledge, making them best placed to identify and help those most in need.
- 1.5. The Guidance states that Local Authorities should deliver at least part of the support via an application process to ensure that all residents can request support.
- 1.6. Rather than focus on one specific vulnerable group, the DWP have stated that Authorities should use the wide range of data and sources of information at their disposal to identify and provide support to a broad cross section of vulnerable households in their area.
- 1.7. Authorities should particularly consider how they can support residents that have not previously received Cost of Living Support. Support is not restricted to vulnerable households in receipt of benefits. However, the guidance also states that residents that have received previous cost of living support can still be supported through this round of Household Support funding.
- 1.8. Bolton has been awarded funding totalling £5,56 million to cover the financial year 2023/24.
- 1.9. There is no requirement for the Local Authority to ringfence the funding to resident groups but there is an expectation that support is available to a range of residents

including families with children, residents with disabilities, pensioners and carers. This list is not exhaustive.

1.10. Eligible spend can include:

- Energy and water
- Food
- Essential linked to energy and water
- Wider essentials
- Housing costs
- Advice

1.11. The fund cannot be used to provide mortgage support.

1.12. Reasonable administrative costs can be covered by the fund including staffing, advertising, web page design, printing application forms and small IT changes.

1.13. Funding must be spent or committed by 31st March 2024, although unredeemed vouchers can be recycled providing they are used for the same purpose.

1.14. The Authority can also provide funding to third party organisations including registered charities, food banks and voluntary organizations.

2. PROPOSALS

2.1. Provision of Supermarket vouchers to families whose children meet the qualifying conditions for Free School Meals (FSM).

- This would be aimed at families with children that are both school age and pre-school age (0 to 5 years old)
- This would provide support to approximately 15,000 children across the Borough.
- The support would be provided through the May, Summer, October, Christmas and February holiday periods.
- A voucher to the value of £15 would be issued digitally via the schools for school age children and the Council for those children aged 0 to 5
- Based on an approximate figure of 15,000 children this would account for approximately £2.15M of the available grant.

2.2. Support for Foster Carers

- The provision of a £50K budget ringfenced to support Foster Carers with increased energy costs.

2.3 Support for Care Leavers

- The provision of a £50K budget ringfenced to support Care Leavers with increased energy costs.

2.4 Support for Carers

- The provision of a £50K budget ringfenced to support Carers with increased energy costs.

2.5 Enhancing the Council's Local Welfare Provision Scheme (LWP)

- This is an application-based scheme that provides support in the form of food parcels, gas & electric top ups for those residents on meters, energy vouchers, essential household items and travel costs.
- It is proposed that using the HSF the Council would provide 2 weeks food provision and a £50 payment towards fuel costs, increasing to £100 for couples & families with children.
- The Council would also continue to support families with essential household items and white goods including cookers, fridge freezers and washing machines.
- The scheme criteria would be relaxed by removing any restrictions that would require claimants to be in receipt of a qualifying benefit. Claimants would still be required to provide a breakdown of their income and expenditure which will be used to decide the level of support. This means the scheme will be open to all residents.
- It is proposed that the scheme be amended and a budget totalling £1.1M is made available to LWP to cover the period 1st April 2023 to 31st March 2024

2.6 Commissioning Community organisations through the Bolton's Fund

- It is proposed to invest £400K of HSF in the Bolton's Fund to support a specific round providing support with food, essential items and support with energy related costs. This will enable third sector organisations in Bolton to submit bids aimed at supporting residents in the community.
- The CVS will continue to support organisations through the bidding process.

2.7 Supporting the provision of Warm Spaces

- Part of Bolton's Cost of Living Response is aimed at the creation of warm spaces, located across the Borough, where residents can spend time and access a range of support, advice and activities.
- To step this provision up again from 1st October 2023 it is anticipated that to we will need to provide a range of support including food, hot drinks, activities and a contribution to energy costs,

- It is proposed that a budget of £100K is initially set aside to cover costs relating to this offer.

2.8 Money Skills Service

- Provision of a £150K ringfenced budget to support the work of the Money Skills Service including:
 - Energy support for residents not on meters
 - Provision of wider essentials
 - Event co-ordination
 - Money & Debt advice

2.9 Care & Repair Service

- Provision of a £150K ringfenced budget to support the work of the Care & Repair Service including support with:
 - Boiler servicing
 - Boiler repairs
 - Boiler replacements
 - Support with wider essentials

2.10 Supporting residents with housing costs.

- The HSF can be used to support residents with housing costs in cases of genuine emergency.
- We are seeing a significant increase in residents requesting support in this area and consequently it is proposed we set aside a budget of £60K to provide this support.

2.11 Administration costs

- There will be administration costs associated with increased LWP demand, an additional Bolton's Fund round, the delivery of cost of living events and publicity.
- It is proposed we set aside £100K to cover these costs.

2.12 Winter Contingency Fund

- It is proposed that additional funding totalling £1.2M is set aside to provide further support through the Winter to be approved by the relevant Executive Cabinet Member.
- This support could include:
 - Targeted support for Pensioners
 - Targeted support for residents in receipt of a disability benefit
 - Additional LWP funding
 - Additional funding for Money Skills Service
 - Additional funding for the Care & Repair service

- Further support for Carers, Foster Carers and Care Leaver

3. Financial breakdown

HSF Budget	£5,560,000
Vouchers to support children eligible for FSM	£ 2,150,000
Support for Foster Carers	£ 50,000
Support for Care Leavers	£ 50,000
Support for Carers	£ 50,000
LWP budget	£ 1,100,000
Bolton's Fund	£ 400,000
Warm Spaces	£ 100,000
Housing Costs	£ 60,000
Money Skills Service	£ 150,000
Care & Repair Service	£ 150,000
Administrations costs	£ 100,000
Winter Contingency Fund	£ 1,200,000
Total	£5,560,000

4 IMPACTS AND IMPLICATIONS

4.1 Financial

None – fully funded through the Household Support Fund

4.2 Legal

None

4.3 HR

None

4.4 Climate Change

None

4.5 Other

None

5 EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT (EIA)

5.1 Under the Equality Act 2010, the council has a general duty to have due regard to the need to:

1. **eliminate unlawful discrimination**, harassment, victimisation, and any other conduct prohibited by the Act.
2. **advance equality of opportunity** between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it; and
3. **foster good relations** between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it.

5.1 It is important to consider how the proposals contained within this report may impact positively or negatively on protected characteristics. It was determined that the proposals, which consider the DWP Guidance, provide financial support to financially vulnerable groups regardless of their protected characteristics. Consequently, it is not anticipated that the proposals within this report will have a differential impact on any of Bolton's diversity groups. A full EIA is therefore not required at this stage but an EIA screening document can be found at Appendix 1

6 **CONSULTATION**

6.1 There was no requirement to consult.

7 **VISION 2030**

7.1 The proposals are aimed at providing financial support to residents in the Borough and consequently will help to support a number the key Vision 2030 outcomes of Starting Well, Living Wells and Ageing Well.

RECOMMENDATIONS

8.1 Cabinet is recommended to approve the proposals.

Appendix 1

Equality Impact Assessment – Screening Questions

Title of report or proposal:
Household Support Fund, 1st April 2023 to 31st March 2024, and Bolton's Response to cost of living increases

Directorate:	Corporate Resources
Section:	Revenues, Benefits and Customer Services
Date:	27th March 2023

Public sector bodies need to be able to evidence that they have given due regard to the impact and potential impact on all people with 'protected characteristics' in shaping policy, in delivering services, and in relation to their own employees.

Under the Equality Act 2010, the council has a general duty to have due regard to the need to:

- 1. eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct prohibited by the Act;**
- 2. advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it; and**
- 3. foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it.**

By completing the following questions, the three parts of the equality duty will be consciously considered as part of the decision-making process.

Details of the outcome of the Equality Impact Assessment must also be included in the main body of the report.

Screening Questions

1. Describe in summary the aims, objectives and purpose of the proposal, including desired outcomes.
 - 1.1. The Government, via the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), has recently announced £842 million has been made available to County Councils and Unitary Authorities in England to support those most in need this winter during the final stages of economic recovery. This funding covers the period 1st April 2023 to 31st March 2024 inclusive and aims to provide financial support to residents to assist with a range of cost-of-living expenses, in particular costs relating to energy and food.
2. Is this a new policy / function / service or review of existing one?

Review of an existing approach.

3. Who are the main stakeholders in relation to the proposal?

Bolton residents and a range of third-party organisations are also primary stakeholders.

4. In summary, what are the anticipated (positive or negative) impacts of the proposal?

It is anticipated that a significant number of Bolton residents will benefit from the support that will be provided via the DWP's Household Support Fund. This will take the form of vouchers, energy top up payments, boiler support, essential household items and food.

It is not anticipated that there will be any negative impacts, as support will be available to all Bolton residents and will be based on their financial situation and the range of welfare benefits they are in receipt of.

Bolton Council will work with a range of stakeholders to ensure that those that are eligible for support are targeted in line with the HSF Guidance. Engagement will be monitored throughout the programme period for take-up and evaluated, where possible, for non-engagement to understand if barriers are preventing particular groups from accessing.

Information will be available on both the Council website and in paper form for those residents that are unable to access information online.

DWP monitoring requirements will ensure that every quarter the Council will be submitting returns that will breakdown data into specific resident categories including families, pensioners and residents with a disability. This will ensure that we are regularly monitoring take up of support and will be able to target specific resident groups if we feel take up is low.

The creation of a Winter Contingency Fund will also enable us to review expenditure and demand at the end of the Summer with a view to making further recommendations regarding the support offer through Autumn and Winter.

5. What, if any, cumulative impact could the proposal have?

It is felt that there will be a positive cumulative impact based on the various levels of support available to residents and the financial support that will be provided to the third sector organisations that are successful in accessing the Bolton's Fund

Contact Officer

Name:

Phil Rimmer

Date:

27th March 2023

Directorate Equalities Lead Officer

Name:

Rebecca Albrow

Date:

27th March 2023

