

Report of	Meeting	Date
Director of Communities (Introduced by Cabinet Member (Communities, Leisure and Wellbeing))	Council	Wednesday, 19 July 2023

Household Support Fund Round 4

Is this report confidential?	No
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Is this decision key?	Not Applicable
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Purpose of the Report

1. To confirm South Ribble's allocation of Household Support Fund (HSF) Round 4 and agree the processes and authority to accept and deliver the grant.

Recommendations to Council

2. To accept the grant allocation of £680,000 and create a 2023/24 revenue budget accordingly.
3. To proceed to develop a delivery plan which reflects specific criteria set out in the government guidance published to allocate and administer the grant.
4. That decisions on the delivery plan be delegated to the Director of Communities in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Communities, Leisure and Wellbeing.

Reasons for recommendations

5. Household Support Fund offers the opportunity for the Council to support both vulnerable residents, and those who have been adversely financially affected by COVID and the Cost of Living crisis.
6. Ensuring best use of this funding is directly in line with the Council's priorities, and provides the opportunity to ease financial pressures

Other options considered and rejected

7. Across Lancashire, district councils are taking a range of approaches in distribution of Household Support Fund, including automatic payments to benefit recipients, energy grants and provision of shopping vouchers.

8. Conversations have been held with council services, charities and community groups who support vulnerable households, to ascertain current levels of demand. The delivery plan will align with feedback received.

Corporate priorities

9. The report relates to the following corporate priorities:

An exemplary council	Thriving communities
A fair local economy that works for everyone	Good homes, green spaces, healthy places

Background to the report

10. SRBC has been allocated £680,000 in the fourth round of Household Support Fund, resourced by the Department of Works and Pensions (DWP) and administered by Lancashire County Council (LCC). A total of £19,356,470 has been awarded for the whole of Lancashire to cover the 23/24 financial year.
11. As with previous rounds, LCC is retaining a portion of the funding to provide shopping vouchers to families with children in receipt of free school meals during holidays, and a number of support services
12. DWP guidance for councils states that HSF should 'primarily be used to support households in the most need with food, energy and water bills. It can also be used to support households with essential costs related to those items and with wider essential costs.'

Proposals

13. The Council's Communities and Housing Service has successfully delivered three previous rounds of HSF, with excellent feedback received from resident and community groups. DWP guidance sets out an expectation that councils should utilise the round four funding in a similar way as earlier HSF rounds.
14. The main areas that the guidance would like delivery to focus include,
- Focus on groups who have not benefitted from any recent cost of living support payments,
 - There is no ringfence of any proportion of the funding for any cohort of people/households (within HSF 2 there was targets on families and pensioners),
 - Must operate an element of the scheme on an application process,
 - Emphasis on supporting low-income households with cost of energy,
 - Provide support with food and wider essentials,
 - Support with housing costs in exceptional cases of genuine emergency and where existing housing support schemes do not meet this exceptional need,
 - The scheme is clearly advertised and is available throughout most of the fund period, either continuously or in regular intervals over the course of the scheme,

- There is no requirement to apply means testing as a way of determining eligibility,
 - A resident does not need to be on benefits or unemployed to receive this funding if they can demonstrate need,
 - A resident can access the fund on more than one occasion if necessary,
 - This fund is open to people with no recourse to public funds.
15. Key changes for round four include direct promotion of HSF to unpaid carers and care leavers, and up to 10% of the allocation is available for provision of advice services.
16. HSF cannot be used to pay for:
- any requests for items that are not essential.
 - applications from those with sufficient income or savings
 - requests for support where this is the responsibility of the landlord
17. In addition, priority is given to those who have not been eligible for income related benefits and who have not had any other government cost of living support.

Initial Scoping

18. Discussions have taken place with community partners and agencies, both direct and through partnership channels such as the South Ribble Together Network and Community Food Network to understand the needs of our communities, and the best way of utilising the HSF funding.
19. Based on this feedback, insight and lessons learnt from previous rounds, a targeted delivery plan has been drawn up.

Proposed Approach

20. This report sets out recommendations for how the funding could be allocated with the objectives of directing the funding towards those in most need and meeting the guidance provided.
21. The fund will help with short-term living costs such as food, energy, and essential items, develop existing schemes to widen the impact, and signpost to other sources of advice and assistance.

Phased Approach

22. HSF Round Four will be delivered via a phased approach, with the delivery of Phase One commencing immediately following council approval, and Phase Two following later in the year, ready for winter. 50% of the funding will be allocated to each phase, this being £306,000 per phase when deducting the 10% admin fee.
23. This phased approach allows the use of the funds to be more flexible, allowing the team to adapt to changing community needs, and evaluate what works well before committing the funds for Phase Two.
24. In Phase One, funds will be allocated to:

- Energy vouchers via Citizen's Advice,
- Home adaptations via the council's 'Warm Homes' grants,
- Grants to commission targeted services,
- 'Step Up' grants,
- Holiday clubs (building on already successful School Uniform Shop project),
- Resource for advice services.

Evaluation from Phase One will determine how much funding is allocated to each of the above in Phase Two, and whether any of these schemes are amended or cancelled.

Targeted Approach

25. The Communities team will use a targeted approach to identify those most in need.
26. Internal data will be used to identify residents most in need of support, data sets used will include council tax support scheme, council tax arrears, disabled facilities grants, and assisted bins collection register. From this data, priority cohorts will be identified, and targeted communications will be carried out.
27. Data gathered from the previous phases will be used to highlight those who were assessed and in need as well as reaching new applicants who need support.
28. The South Ribble Integrated Team (SRIT) will be utilised to identify complex cases where financial support is needed.
29. The council's Social Prescribing team will be equipped with knowledge and understanding of the support available through the HSF Round 4 and how this can be accessed. This will enable Social Prescribing Link Workers to access this support for their cases, and signpost other individuals and agencies.
30. The support available and referral pathways will be clearly communicated with key partners through the following partnerships and networks; South Ribble Together Network, South Ribble Community Food Network, South Ribble Social Isolation Network, and South Ribble Dementia Action Alliance. This will ensure that all the groups and agencies engaged in these networks can confidently signpost their service users and customers to appropriate support.
31. Support offers will be communicated through schools to reach parents. This will be via Headteacher Cluster meetings and the Council's Active Health team.
32. Support accessed by working families has been limited in previous rounds, therefore the Communities team sees increasing awareness of the support available through the HSF amongst this group as a priority. This will include working with the Investment and Skills team to send communications through local employers, particularly those with large workforces with lower incomes (warehouses, delivery drivers, social care etc.).
33. Details of the funding and how to access it will be widely shared with partners and community stakeholders and made available on the Council's website.

Commission Grants

34. In previous rounds, grants have been provided directly to key community partners to enhance the support that they provide to their service users. Although this has been

successful, the reach of this support has been limited as it only available to those already working with these partners.

35. In round 4, funding will be allocated to targeted commissions that provide support to specific groups, in alignment with HSF guidance. More specifically, these are:
 - Households with children,
 - Households with pensioners,
 - Unpaid carers,
 - Care leavers,
 - Households with disabled people.
36. Community partners will be invited to submit applications for grant funding, outlining specific services or projects that will be delivered to directly support these groups. This will make the support more targeted and easier to monitor.
37. 25% of the funding within Phase One will be allocated to 'Commissioned Grants', split equally across the five groups above. Each will be allocated £15,000 each, totalling £75,000. Dependant on the applications received, these may be awarded as single grants to one community partner or agency or split across numerous smaller and more focused grants.
38. This method will be reviewed after Phase One to evaluate its success and effectiveness.

Energy and Housing

39. Citizens Advice will deliver energy support and provide residents with vouchers towards covering the cost of energy bills. An initial rate of £200 to £300 will be set as a guide which residents can apply. In line with the funding criteria, it will prioritise those who have not received other cost of living payments.
40. The phased approach will ensure we can sufficiently support households over the challenging winter months.
41. The Council will continue the delivery of the 'Warm Homes' grants scheme that has been successfully delivered in previous rounds. This will allow residents to benefit from home adaptations that improves the energy efficiency of their homes (such as boiler repairs/replacements, fitting draft excluders, glazing improvements), creating long-term savings on energy bills. This funding will also support the disabled facilities grants scheme.
42. 33% of funding within Phase One will be allocated to these schemes, totalling £100,000.

Food and Essentials

43. Foodbanks and Community Shops will be invited to apply for grant funding to deliver targeted projects. The Community Development team will work closely with these partners to submit applications and develop targeted schemes.
44. The Community Development team will hold a supply of supermarket vouchers supplied through LCC Edenred system which will enable quick support to residents who contact the Council in an emergency and provide support within the mobilisation period. These vouchers have been selected as they do not allow the purchase or

alcohol, tobacco, or lottery products.

45. The 'Warm Welcome' initiative will be resumed in winter where residents will not only be able to keep warm without paying to heat their homes, but will also have access to food, and wider advice on support.
46. The Council's successful 'School Uniform Shop' project will be delivered throughout summer and developed to incorporate wider support. This will include having access to food to takeaway, and access to support services in the shop, including but not limited to Citizen's Advice, Credit Union, and Social Prescribers.
47. Dependant on findings in the Phase One evaluation, a similar project may be delivered in winter.
48. As in previous rounds, funding will also be allocated to 'Step Up' grants. These grants are used to support residents to fund things that other funding sources often exclude. Examples include, white goods, carpets, cleaning/removal services, debts, and arrears. These grants will be a key resource for Social Prescribers.

20% of funding within Phase One will be allocated to these schemes, totalling £63,000.

Advice services

49. Funding will be allocated to improving local capacity for advice services, this will be through both Citizens Advice and the Council.
50. 22% of funding within Phase One will be allocated to funding this resource, totalling £68,000. This resource will be available for a 12-month period.
51. All partners are made aware of essential support available across the borough and work closely together to provide signposting to residents which ensures a wider range of support can be given.

Breakdown of proposed Phase One spend

52. Shown in table below:

Phase One Total	£306,000	100%
Commission Grants	£75,000	25%
Energy and Housing	£100,000	33%
Food and Essentials	£63,000	20%
Advice Services	£68,000	22%

(% rounded to nearest full number)

53. Phase Two spend will be determined following an evaluation of Phase One. It is recommended that the decision to approve this will be a delegated decision made by the Director of Community in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Communities, Leisure, and Wellbeing.

Grant agreements

54. Grant and service level agreements will be drafted for delivery partners and successful recipients of commission grants. These will set out objectives, performance measure, and monitoring requirements. Learnings will be taken from the recent Boost Fund Plus and Leisure Local Community Fund community grant

schemes.

Funding control

55. Funding is proposed to be allocated to delivery partners in the form of direct payments.
56. There will be a decision-making panel responsible for awarding commissioned grants. This will consist of the Cabinet Member for Communities, Leisure, and Wellbeing, and representatives from key partner agencies (who have not submitted applications).
57. Delivery partners will record funding issued and support provided in line with the management information template provided by DWP. South Ribble Borough Council will collate this information and submit this to LCC at prescribed intervals during delivery and final submission at the end of the scheme.

Eligibility and evidence

58. As outlined in the grant agreements, management of eligibility and access to the funding and support will be led by the delivery partner, based on their professional judgement. This aims to ensure that people are not refused much needed support due to strict guidelines (i.e. can only access support once), whilst also preventing the scheme from being taken advantage of.
59. Delivery partners will be required to determine that the funding is only used to support residents in South Ribble.
60. Guidance material used to deliver the scheme will be provided to delivery partners to help guide them through assessment and checking processes.

Data control

61. Delivery partners will use their own in-house policies and procedures to control data and will be required to maintain the requirements as set out in grant agreement documentation regarding applicable policies. The council we seek assurance that these policies and procedures are in place.

Scheme Coordination

62. The Communities team will oversee coordination of funding, support delivery partners and liaise with LCC. They will be the point of contact for complex cases, internal communication, and external enquiries.
63. Guidance documentation outlining the delivery approach and any specific details will be provided to delivery partners.
64. Delivery partners will be invited to evaluation meetings to discuss performance/effectiveness of the service and current/emerging community needs.

Monitoring

65. Delivery partners will be expected to record data in accordance the grant agreement and provide this to the Council to collate and report to the DWP via LCC.

66. Delivery partners will also record wider data to help gather insight on the root causes of the resident's difficulties.

Linking to other workstreams

67. This delivery proposal will link the support provided by the delivery partners to several other existing and emerging workstreams and existing early intervention and support pathways within the Council and other external partners.

68. This will ensure support options are maximised in an efficient way and demonstrates the ambition to co-deliver community impact projects directly with community partners.

Climate change and air quality

69. The proposals in this report do not directly impact the Council's climate change and sustainability targets, but Household Support Funding does cover measures such as:

- Replacing items such as windows and boilers with more energy efficient models.
- Use of CAB to offer fuel vouchers alongside energy advice and support.
- Purchasing new carpets, curtains, and bedding to make homes warmer.

Equality and diversity

70. There are no negative impacts on any of the protected groups because of Household Support Fund. There are positive impacts on age, disability and maternity as financial support given through the fund seeks to reduce vulnerability.

71. An impact assessment has been completed.

Risk

72. The Household Support Fund has been widely publicised, and previous rounds have been used to support people who need assistance with living costs. There is a clear reputational risk in not spending the borough's allocation and having to return funding to the DWP. Mitigation of this risk once again includes using a range of providers, a phased approach, and monitoring of spend and impact.

Comments of the Statutory Finance Officer

73. The Household Support Fund Phase 4 (HSF4) allocation to South Ribble Council of £680,000 will be used to administer the grant based on the specific criteria set out in the government guidance. The funding must be spent by 31st March 2024 or returned to Lancashire County Council and ultimately the government.

Comments of the Monitoring Officer

74. There are no concerns from a Monitoring officer perspective with this report. What is proposed is building on previous good practice. In appropriate cases grant agreements will be drawn up and entered into.

Background documents

75. Impact Assessment.

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