

Report To: Managing Director

Date of Meeting: 12th November 2021

Report Title: Household Support Fund

Report By: Peter Grace
Chief Finance Officer

Key Decision: Yes

Classification: Open

Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to approve receipt and expenditure of £195,000 grant funding from East Sussex County Council (ESCC) under the DWP's Household Support Fund, for administration by the Council. This includes 12% administration costs

Recommendation(s)

- 1. The Council's Managing Director in consultation with the Leader of the Council, the Deputy Leader, the lead member for Financial Management and Estates and other appropriate Councillors (as required by the emergency powers) approve the decision to receive and administer the grant award of £195,000 paid to Hastings Borough Council under the Household Support Fund. This decision is being taken by the Managing Director pursuant to her urgency powers exercisable to enable the Council to act quickly in administering the provision of financial support to qualifying vulnerable households in the Borough;**
- 2. To administer payments to residents who qualify in accordance with the scheme's eligibility criteria; and**
- 3. To commend Hastings Borough Council staff for their proactive response to ESCC's call for assistance.**

Reasons for Recommendations

- 1. To enable the Council to act quickly in the administration and distribution of the Household Support Grant to qualifying vulnerable households in the Borough as the country recovers from the Covid-19 pandemic.**

Introduction

1. On the 30th September 2021 the DWP announced a Household Support Fund designed to assist vulnerable households with essentials as the country recovers from the pandemic. The Household Support Fund must be set up and delivered quickly, with the grant to be spent by March 2022.
2. East Sussex County Council have received funding of £3.9m and they have requested assistance from the East Sussex District and Borough Councils to distribute approximately £750,000.
3. Wealden DC have led a Task and Finish group with support from Rother, Hastings, Eastbourne and Lewes to design a support scheme that meets the DWP guidance and supports vulnerable households.

Analysis

4. The Household Support Fund provides additional financial support for households struggling to meet the costs of utilities and essential supplies. The fund will primarily cover the following:
 5. **Food** - the Fund should primarily be used to provide support with food whether in kind or through vouchers or cash.
 6. **Energy and Water** – the Fund should also primarily be used to support with energy bills for any form of fuel that is used for the purpose of domestic heating, cooking or lighting, including oil or portable gas cylinders. It can also be used to support with water bills including for drinking, washing, cooking, and sanitary purposes and sewerage.
 7. **Essentials linked to energy and water** - the Fund can be used to provide support with essentials linked to energy and water (including sanitary products, warm clothing, soap, blankets, boiler service/repair, purchase of equipment including fridges, freezers, ovens, etc.), in recognition that a range of costs may arise which directly affect a household's ability to afford or access food, energy and water.
 8. **Wider essentials** - the Fund can be used to support with wider essential needs not linked to energy and water, should Authorities consider this appropriate in their area. These may include, but are not limited to, support with other bills including broadband or phone bills, clothing, and essential transport-related costs such as repairing a car, buying a bicycle or paying for fuel.
9. The Task and Finish Group concluded that the Fund should initially focus on the two primary support measures a) and b) – Food and Energy and Water. However, the project will be closely monitored and the wider aspects c) and d) considered if appropriate and subject to funding being available.
10. Officers are setting up an application process using the Ascendant system, which is not a system currently used by HBC. This entails the rapid implementation of legal and data protection agreements, as well as work to install the system and train staff.
11. Whilst the application process will be administered and assessed by the Revenues and Benefits team, they will be supported by the Community Hub/Contact Centre, and the Finance team who will issue payments for Energy and Water. The final arrangements are still being embedded.

12. The Fund is expected to launch across East Sussex to the public w/c 15th November 2021.

Implications

Financial

13. The council will receive £195,000 of the Household Support Grant from ESCC and redistribute to residents. All distributing councils are able to retain 12% of the grant to cover the administration costs involved, reducing the fund pot to approximately £171,600. The County Council are meeting the £6,700 cost of the Ascendant software solution – licence for 1 year.

Legal

14. The administration of the Household Support Grant was developed by District and Borough Councils (housing and benefit officers) to ensure it meets the requirements established by Central Government and the Council's powers under the Localism Act 2011.

Anti-poverty

15. The Household Support Grant is designed to help most vulnerable households in the District which are suffering following the Covid-19 pandemic.

Organisational consequences

16. Several teams staff across the Council have urgently prioritised work to support the implementation of this new scheme in a matter of days, including Revenues and Benefits, ICT, Legal, Transformation, Communications, Financial Services and the Community Contact Centre. The costs of staff resources will be partly met by the Household Support Grant as part of the administration charge.

Wards Affected

All

Policy Implications

Equalities and Community Cohesiveness	Yes
Crime and Fear of Crime (Section 17)	No
Risk Management	Yes
Environmental Issues & Climate Change	No
Economic/Financial Implications	Yes
Human Rights Act	No
Organisational Consequences	Yes
Local People's Views	No
Anti-Poverty	Yes
Legal	Yes

Additional Information

Officer to Contact

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