

Record of decision taken under delegated powers by a council officer



Title:	Surrey County Council Response to Covid: Household Support Grant
Divisions Affected:	All divisions
Key Decision:	Yes
Reason Key:	Affects two or more Divisions
Decision taken under delegation by virtue of:	Cabinet decision 31 May 2022 (2021/22 Outturn Financial Report)

Summary

As part of the Sprint Statement, £421m has been made available to County Councils and Unitary Authorities in England to support those most in need to help with significantly rising living costs. This funding is to be known as the Household Support Grant and covers the period 01 April 2022 to 30 September 2022 inclusive. Local Authorities have discretion on exactly how this funding is used within the scope of the grant determination and guidance issued by the Department for Work & Pensions (DWP). The expectation is that it should primarily be used to support households in the most need particularly those including children and pensioners who would otherwise struggle with energy bills, food and water bills. It can also be used to support households with essential costs related to those items and with wider essential costs. 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. Surrey County Council's allocation of the funding is £5,290,829.72, based on the population of each authority weighted by a function of the English Index of Multiple Deprivation.

At least one third of the total funding must be spent on families with children, and at least a further one third on households with pensioners, beyond this, local authorities have discretion to determine the appropriate schemes for their area, based on their understanding of local needs.

Payment of the grant allocation is on an arrears basis and is subject to the submission of two Management Information (MI) returns to DWP outlining the authority's grant spend and the volume of awards for period 1 April – 30 June 2022 (due July '22) and for the period 1 April – 30 September 2022 (due October '22).

Proposals:

The County Council has taken a partnership approach to developing the following proposals. Working in consultation with district and borough councils and

representatives from the voluntary, community and faith sector (VCF) to discuss the best routes to ensure that funding is allocated to those people most in need, as expediently as possible. The proposals pull together the contribution of a number of organisations across the County that are in contact with residents known to be experiencing financial hardship.

The primary aims of this joint approach was to:

- ensure that the funding is targeted in a way that is as far reaching as possible, to identify those most in need of support across a broad demographic
- minimise administrative burdens and associated costs by utilising existing processes and established groups and support networks who already have a good local understanding of where those who are struggling with the cost of food and bills are and optimise existing knowledge and strengths in these areas.

The proposals are:

1. Continue to support the issue of food vouchers for those eligible for benefit related free school meals, during the upcoming school holidays (May half term and Summer). This will include 2, 3 and 4 year old children with Funded Early Education Provision (FEEP) and EY Pupil Premium.
2. To ensure the Crisis Fund is equipped to meet the demand until the end of the financial year, taking in to account inflation and anticipated demand related pressures and to enable the extension of the level of support offered.
3. Distribute funding to specialist countywide organisations, that actively reach households in need of support with the cost of food and essential bills.
4. To provide some funding to foodbank/community fridges/food clubs to ensure they have enough stock of food/fuel vouchers to meet increased demand over the period.
5. Distribute one third of the funding to Borough and District Councils to develop a mechanism to target pensioners in low income households (£1.7m)
6. Distribute the remaining £0.75m to Boroughs and Districts to utilise existing schemes, local knowledge and local VCF networks to target specific local need in their respective areas. We will allocate based on population adjusted for deprivation factor, which mirrors the DWP formula for the initial allocation.

Allocations given to VCF organisation and the boroughs and districts, will be accompanied by a copy of the grant determination letter for the DWP. It will be the responsibility of the boroughs, districts and VCF organisations to ensure the expenditure funded by their allocation is in line with the guidance that it is spent on emergency support for food and essential costs and that appropriate controls are in place to ensure eligibility of applicants/recipients and to protect against fraud.

In addition, these organisations will be required to return the necessary management information on how their proportion of the allocation has been spent. There will be an interim return due to the Council in July 2022 to meet the requirement of the DWP but also to enable a review of expenditure to date. Surrey County Council will reserve the right to reduce allocations given to boroughs and districts and re-distribute to other areas if spend is not occurring and the grant funding is not reaching the most vulnerable.

Decision made

Decision made:

It was AGREED that:

The following allocations would be made, to be funded by Surrey County Council's allocation of the Household Support Grant:

Food vouchers for children entitled to Free School Meals, including Early Years through school holidays (includes support for care leavers over Christmas period)	£2.2m
Support to pensioners	£1.7m
Support to food banks	£0.2m
Support to VCF sector	£0.2m
Enable enhanced offer of Crisis Fund	£0.2m
Distribute to Borough and District Councils to enable local solutions to meet local requirements	£0.8m
	£5.3m

It should be noted that the issue of food vouchers during the May half term and the payments set out above to food banks and the VCF sector were made under delegations contained in the scheme of delegation, to ensure funds could be distributed as quickly as possible to ensure they reached vulnerable households.

Reasons for Decision:

To assist those most in need of assistance with the cost of food, utilities and other essentials during the winter months, with a particular focus on families with children, in line with the DWP grant conditions.

Decision taken by:	Leigh Whitehouse – Deputy Chief Executive & Executive
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	Director for Resources Tim Oliver – Leader of the Council
Decision taken on:	23 June 2022
To be implemented on:	One-off payments to be made to the organisations/individuals, as set out above.

Alternative options considered

The alternative is to not accept the funding allocation from DWP which would reduce the ability of the Council to support those in the County most in need of assistance with the purchase of food and other essentials, particularly families with Children and pensioners in low income households.

A number of allocation mechanisms were considered, but the proposal above was deemed to provide the most impact and coverage across the County.

Summary of any financial implications

The DWP grant allocation amounts to £5,290,829.72. The funding is due to be received by the Council in 2 tranches based on the submission of accurate allocation management information to the DWP in June and October 2022.

Declarations of conflicts of interest

None

Consultation/Process Followed

Proposals were developed jointly in consultation with borough and district councils and representatives from VCF organisations.

Background Documents

Exempt:

Cabinet report 31st May 2022 on the outturn position for 2021/22 contained delegations to allocate emergency funding provided by Government.