

Record of decision taken under delegated powers by a council officer



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| Title: | Surrey County Council Response to Rising Living Costs: Household Support Fund 3 |
| 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 Min ref:96/22 |

Summary

On 26 May 2022 the government announced, as part of a number of measures to provide help with global inflationary challenges and the significantly rising cost of living, that the £421m Household Support Fund (HSF) would be extended from 01 October 2022 to 31 March 2023. As has been done for previous schemes, the fund will be made available to County Councils and Unitary Authorities in England to support those most in need. Local authorities (LAs) have discretion on exactly how this funding is used within the scope of the grant determination and guidance. 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.

The expectation is that The Fund should be used to support households in the most need; particularly those who may not be eligible for the other support government has recently made available but who are nevertheless in need. Energy bills may be of particular concern to low income households during the period of The Fund and LAs should prioritise supporting households with the cost of energy. Authorities should also consider providing support to disabled people in their area. Disabled people in particular may be facing acute challenges due to the disproportionate impact that rising costs bring for the additional services they need in order to manage their conditions, remain independent and avoid becoming socially isolated. Authorities have the ability to deliver the scheme through a variety of routes including providing vouchers to households, making direct provision of food or goods, or issuing grants to third parties (with the exception of grants for advice provision). Every area must operate at least part of their scheme on an application basis.

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 October – 31

December 2022 (due January '23) and for the period 1 October – 31 March 2023 (due April '23).

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 (October half term, Christmas holiday, February half term). A contingency has also been set aside for the Easter holidays, with a final decision about the level of support being dependent on whether a further tranche of the grant will be available from 1 April 2023. This will include 2, 3 and 4 year old children with Funded Early Education Provision (FEED) and EY Pupil Premium.
2. To support care leavers with a one-off payment to support them with energy costs.
3. To support the families of disabled children with a one-off payment to support them with energy costs.
4. 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.
5. Distribute funding to specialist countywide organisations, that actively reach households in need of support with the cost of food and essential bills. Surrey Coalition of Disabled People will be given a larger grant to distribute to reflect the increased energy needs of disabled residents.

6. 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.
7. Distribute the funding 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 organisations, foodbanks, 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, foodbanks 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 energy, 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 January 2023 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:

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| Food vouchers for children entitled to Free School Meals, including Early Years through school holidays | £2.276 m |
| Support to care leavers | £0.025 m |
| Support to children with disabilities | £0.082 m |
| Support to food banks | £0.2 m |
| Support to VCF sector | £0.2 m |
| Enable enhanced offer of Crisis Fund | £0.2 m |
| Distribute to Borough and District Councils to enable local solutions to meet local requirements | £2.225 m |
| Contingency (to be reviewed in January 2023) | £0.082 m |
| | £5.29 m |

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.

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| Decision taken by: | Leigh Whitehouse – Deputy Chief Executive & Executive Director for Resources Marie Snelling – Executive Director Customer and Communities Katie Stewart – Executive Director Environment Transport and Infrastructure Rachael Wardell – Executive Director for Children, Families & Lifelong Learning. |
| Decision taken on: | 01 November 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 January and April 2023.

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:

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