



Committee Report

PURPOSE: Final Decision Report

KEY OR NON-KEY DECISION: Key decision over £500k spend/save & impacts more than 2 wards

COMMITTEE: Strategy and Resources Committee

DATE: 18 November 2024

TITLE: Household Support Fund 6 (October 2024 to March 2025)

Ward(s): All

Officer presenting the report: Graham Clapp

Job title: Revenues and Benefits Head of Service/Benefits Technical Manager

Committee Chair: Cllr Tony Dyer

Executive Director lead: Paul Martin: Chief Executive Officer

Proposal origin: Other

Purpose of Report:

1. Approve the Household Support Fund 6 Policy and its proposed £4.039m allocation, including change of budget to reflect this funding.
2. Note the Finance Urgent Key Decision taken in September 2024 to spend £1,021,500 of the Household Support Fund in respect of Free School Meals food vouchers over the October and Christmas school holidays.
3. Authorise all steps required to accept and spend the remaining £3 million of the extended allocation.

Evidence Base / Options to consider:

1. Further to the continuing cost of living pressures, the government made the late announcement that there would be a sixth round of the Household Support Fund to cover the period October 2024 to March 2025, with a further £421 million being released to English councils. It is acknowledged that

councils are best placed to support those most in need with the cost of food, energy and water bills, phone, broadband and clothing and in exceptional cases, housing costs. The funding is for six months.

2. The funding to councils on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) is made under section 31 of the Local Government Act 2003, who will administer the scheme and provide direct assistance to vulnerable households and families with children particularly affected by the increase in the cost of living. Funding is £4,039,965.
3. The period of the grant is from October 2024 to March 2025 and payment is made to the council, in arrears, based on two management information (MI) returns in; January 2025, and April 2025, and the amounts committed at the point of their return. Payment will be made in arrears after each MI return.
4. Local authorities were required to outline their spending plans to the DWP by 01 November 2024, with the proposal in Appendix A being forwarded, with caveat that this needed further sign off by this committee.
5. Eligibility criteria has broadly remained the same over all five rounds of funding but is summarised below.
 - Can be used to assist households with the costs of; food, gas/electricity, water, phone/broadband, essential household items (e.g. white goods, beds/bedding, clothing, baby/sanitary products) and housing costs (in exceptional circumstance)
 - Monies are not ringfenced to any proportion of funding for any cohort of people.
 - The fund can be used to provide supplementary advice services to award recipients, including debt and benefit advice, but should not be the primary function.

- Local authorities need to consider those groups who may not have benefitted from any of the recent cost of living support.
- No application is needed if households requiring assistance can be determined in advance.
- Every local authority must, at least in part, have an application basis grant provision i.e. residents should have the opportunity to come forward to ask for support.
- Individuals, regardless of their immigration status are eligible to ensure a basic safety net of support, but only when need is more than existing aid routes.
- Cannot be used for advice or mortgage related costs.
- The scheme must also be adequately advertised.

6. In addition;

- Funding for evaluation activities, including data collection, analysis and report writing, will now be considered eligible spend as an administrative cost.
- Any publicity material for the scheme must make it clear that this funding is being provided by the UK Government.
- Delivery plans must be signed off by your Section 151 Officer and the responsible Cabinet Member before submission to DWP.

7. Details regarding how the fund may be implemented are contained within 3.3 of the policy in appendix A, as well as proposed spend under section 4, for the last 6 months of 2024/25. Note this proposal is in line with the previous four iterations of successful fund allocation.

8. Due to lack of notice and delay in the final grant award, including guidance notes provided by government, and the impending October and Christmas school holidays at the time, a Finance Urgent

Key Decision was taken in September 2024 to use £1,021,500 from the £4.039m grant, to assist 22,700 Free School Meal/Pupil Premium children, by awarding a £15 voucher in October half term and a £30 voucher at Christmas, to each child. This spend accounts for just over £1 million of the total allocation, for these weeks only. A further commitment is made in this policy for the rest of the financial year and is in line with previous support since October 2020, by Bristol City Council.

Officer Recommendations:

That the Committee for Strategy and Resources

1. Approves the Household Support Fund Policy October 2024 – March 2025 and change of budget to reflect this funding as outlined in this report.

Contractual:

2. Authorises the Chief Executive in consultation with the Chair of the Strategy and Resources Committee to take all steps required to accept and spend (including procuring and awarding contracts over £500k) the remaining £3 million of the extended allocation of the DWP Household Support Fund as outlined in Household Support Fund Policy October 2024 – March 2025, and up to the maximum budget envelope outlined in this report.
3. Notes the finance urgent key decision taken in September 2024 to spend £1,021,500 of the Household Support Fund in respect of Free School Meals food vouchers over the October and Christmas school holidays.

Corporate Strategy alignment:

HCW3 Poverty - Tackle food and fuel poverty by assisting households with no or low income, in crisis, in a timely and efficient manner, by providing grant awards and advice to low-income households and in accordance with relevant Bristol City Council policies and central government grants conditions.

City Benefits:

Additional levels of support to households on a low income who have been impacted by ongoing cost of living crisis pressures and those who have suffered a loss of income as a result of the current economic circumstances.

Consultation Details:

None formally but the proposals have been put together through a variety of meetings and consultation over 3 years with various internal and external stakeholders.

Background Documents:

[Get help with the cost of living from your local council \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk)

[Household Support Fund: Guidance for local councils \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk)

[Committee Report, 17 June 2024, Spend of Household Support Fund 5 \(bristol.gov.uk\)](http://bristol.gov.uk)

Revenue Cost	£4,039,965	Source of Revenue Funding	DWP Funded in full
Capital Cost	NA	Source of Capital Funding	NA
One off cost <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Ongoing cost <input type="checkbox"/>		Saving Proposal <input type="checkbox"/> If yes - existing or new saving? Choose an item. OR Income generation proposal <input type="checkbox"/>	

Professional comments section:

1. Finance Advice: Bristol City Council has been allocated £4,039,965 under the Household Support Fund Grant which enables Local Authorities to provide direct support to low-income and vulnerable households. The Grant covers the period October 2024 to March 2025 and is paid to the council in arrears. A Finance Urgent Key Decision was taken in September 2024 to assist 22,700 Free School Meal/Pupil Premium children during the October and Christmas school holiday periods, by awarding a £15 food voucher per

week per child in respect of all those entitled, resulting in expenditure of £1,021,500. This report seeks approval for the Household Support Fund policy October 2024 – March 2025 with a change in budget to reflect this funding and for the Chief Executive in consultation with the Chair of the Strategy & Resources Committee to take all steps required to accept and spend the remaining £3 million of the extended allocation, up to the maximum budget envelope outlined in this report.

Finance Business Partner: Kathryn Long, Finance Business Partner – Resources, 30 September 2024

2. Legal Advice: The procurement process must be conducted in line with the 2015 Procurement Regulations/Procurement Act 2023 and the Councils own procurement rules. Legal services will advise and assist officers with regard to the conduct of the procurement process and the resulting contractual arrangements.

Legal Team Leader: Husinara Jones, Team Manager/Solicitor 1 October 2024

3. Implications on IT: I can see no implications on IT regarding this activity.

IT Team Leader: Alex Simpson, Lead Enterprise Architect, 2 October 2024

4. HR Advice: No HR implications evident.

HR Partner: Bryn Williams, Employee Relations and HR Manager, 1 October 2024

APPENDICES

Appendix A – Further essential background / detail on the proposal	YES
Household Support Fund Policy 6 October – March 2025	
Appendix B – Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA)	YES
Appendix C – Environmental Impact Assessment	YES
Appendix D – Risk assessment	YES
Appendix E – Exempt Information	NO
Appendix F – Details of consultation carried out - internal and external	NO
Appendix G – Options appraisal matrix	NO
Appendix H – Business case / financial analysis	NO