

Decision Pathway – Report



PURPOSE: Key decision

MEETING: Cabinet

DATE: 14 December 2021

TITLE	Household Support Fund		
Ward(s)	All		
Author: Matthew Kendall	Job title: Benefits Technical Manager		
Cabinet lead: Cllr Craig Cheney	Executive Director lead: Mike Jackson		
Proposal origin: Other			
Decision maker: Cabinet Member Decision forum: Cabinet			
Purpose of Report: To approve the proposed spend and allocation of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) £4m Hardship Support Fund.			
Evidence Base:			
Background:			
<p>On 30 September 2021 the government announced a package of targeted financial support for those in need over the winter period. The £500 million (£421m for England) Hardship Fund sees new funding issued to Councils 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.</p> <p>The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) has allocated £4,039,965 to Bristol, under section 31 of the Local Government Act 2003, to award grants and administer this scheme. The period of the grant covers from October 2021 to March 2022 and payment is made to the council in arrears, based on two management information returns in January and April 2022 and the amounts committed at the point of their return. Actual payments will be credited in February/March 2022 and May/June 2022 respectively.</p> <p>The eligibility criteria are contained in 3.2 of appendix A, but the main points are that a minimum of 50% of funding must be ringfenced to support households with children, whilst the other 50% can be used to fund other households genuinely in need of support this winter. Any grant should be predominately 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).</p> <p>The details of how the fund is to planned to be spent are summarised both below and also again in 3.3 of appendix A of this report, but effectively the proposal here is that rather than simply replicating the previous awards made solely to free school meals recipients, a more imaginative and wider reaching approach has been taken, following consideration of all of the factors that affect poverty across low income families, especially around fuel and food and then determining how the biggest impact could be made to those who are most in need and not already benefitting from other financial assistance for this period.</p> <p>These households have been identified by looking at a variety of data sets across both Bristol City Council and DWP, excluding those who are already receiving the equivalent assistance, such as winter fuel payments for people over pension age, in order to best target those who are in need.</p>			

This proposed solution therefore is a blend of a continuation of providing food poverty assistance to those children currently entitled to free school meals/pupil premium over the holiday period, as well as support to more than 28,000 low income working age households over the winter, via a food voucher (NB; as a fuel voucher does not exist) to assist recipients not only with food poverty, but also indirectly with gas/electricity poverty, by enabling them to 'free up' some of their household expenditure to meet these increased costs.

The proposed spend is as follows:

- £660,000 – Free School Meals food vouchers for October and February half terms (October has already been distributed). Awarded to BlackHawk Network via a Crown Commercial Services framework agreement. Please note [Officer Executive Decision \(OED\)](#) reflecting the urgent decision to enable payment to be made during the October half term.
- £2,850,000 – £100 food voucher to go to 28,500 low-income households identified by Bristol City Council data to be delivered in December and before Christmas 2021 in order to enable increase household budgets to assist with winter pressures including gas/electricity poverty. Awarded to BlackHawk Network via a Crown Commercial Services framework agreement.
- £100,000 to assist those with No Recourse to Public Funds via Red Cross
- £229,965 - Contingency support for households that may need additional support and are not identified in the above targeted support and to be approved by Cllr Cheney under delegated authority.
- £200,0000 - administration costs (including the cost of the vouchers themselves).

All public authorities must comply with the Public Sector Equality Duty and data is required to be kept and maintained by the relevant organisations and provided to the Council to report on delivery of agreed objectives and actual spend.

Details of the proposed spend and households that will benefit are also contained within Appendix A.

Cabinet Member / Officer Recommendations: That Cabinet;

Approve:

1. The acceptance of the Department for Work and Pension Hardship Support Fund of £4,039,965, as set out in this report and associated budget adjustment.
2. Approve the allocation and proposed spend as set out in this report
3. Award to BlackHawk Network via a Crown Commercial Services framework agreement to give effect to the distribution of the Household Support Fund and distributed in full by December 2021.
4. Authorise the Director Finance in consultation with the Deputy Mayor, Cabinet member for Finance, Governance, Property and Culture to take all necessary steps to give effect to the fund allocation, including any decisions in relation to the contingency.

Note:

5. The Officer Executive Decision to allocate under urgency £330,00 for FSM vouchers during the October 2021 half term

Corporate Strategy alignment:

The proposed spend and allocation of the Hardship Support Fund aligns to the corporate strategy in which the vision is for Bristol to be a City;

1. In which everyone benefits from the city's success and no-one is left behind.
2. Where people have access to decent jobs and to affordable homes.
3. In which services and opportunities are accessible.
4. Where life chances and health are not determined by wealth and background.

This is through providing support to households who are on a low income, so that levels of poverty are reduced with the benefits to health and opportunities that this brings.

City Benefits:

Additional levels of support to households on a low income to help alleviate winter pressures for those who have been impacted by; the COVID pandemic, the ending of the £20 Universal Credit uplift, ending of furlough schemes, increased energy bills and the cost of living, the lifting of the eviction ban and any loss of income because of the current economic circumstances and the current challenging financial circumstances.

Consultation Details:

None at present.

Background Documents:

[Government launches £500m support for vulnerable households over winter - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-launches-500m-support-for-vulnerable-households-over-winter)

[Officer Executive Decision – Food vouchers for Free School Meals children \(October 2021 half term\)](#)

Revenue Cost	£4,039,965	Source of Revenue Funding	15461 (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"/>	Income generation proposal <input type="checkbox"/>

Required information to be completed by Financial/Legal/ICT/ HR partners:

1. Finance Advice: Council is requested to approve the disbursement of £4.04m hardship funding and its proposed target areas in line with eligibility criteria as outlined in Appendix A. This scheme and administration of it is fully funded by the DWP so that there is no financial impact on BCC's budget..

Finance Business Partner: Jemma Prince, Finance Business Partner, 8 November 2021

2. Legal Advice: To the extent that the means employed for the distribution of the fund may involve any procurement activities, then, as the report notes, these must be conducted in a manner consistent with the Public Contracts Regulations 2015 and the Council's own procurement rules.
In addition, Cabinet is reminded that, given the subject matter of the report, particular regard will need to be had to the EQIA. Similarly given the intended delegation, the Chief Executive will likewise need to ensure proper regard is had to the Council equalities duties and the EQIA, when determining the arrangements for the distribution of the funds.

Legal Team Leader: Eric Andrews, Legal Services, 4/11/2021

3. Implications on IT: I can see no IT implications in this proposal.

IT Team Leader: Gavin Arbuckle – Head of Service Operations, Digital Transformation, 5th November 2021.

4. HR Advice: If vouchers are the chosen method of distribution of these funds then this can be achieved within the existing staff team. If on the other hand bank transfers are the chosen method then additional staff employed via an agency or on a fixed term contract basis will be required.

HR Partner: James Brereton (HR Business Partner), 30th October 2021.

EDM Sign-off	Mike Jackson	17/11/2021
Cabinet Member sign-off	Cllr Craig Cheney	29/11/2021
For Key Decisions - Mayor's Office sign-off	Mayor's Office	15/11/2021

Appendix A – Further essential background / detail on the proposal Hardship Support Fund Policy (October 2021)	YES
Appendix B – Details of consultation carried out - internal and external	NO
Appendix C – Summary of any engagement with scrutiny	NO
Appendix D – Risk assessment	YES
Appendix E – Equalities screening / impact assessment of proposal	YES
Appendix F – Eco-impact screening/ impact assessment of proposal	YES

Appendix G – Financial Advice	NO
Appendix H – Legal Advice	NO
Appendix I – Exempt Information	NO
Appendix J – HR advice	NO
Appendix K – ICT	NO
Appendix L – Procurement	NO