

Decision Pathway – Report



PURPOSE: Key decision

MEETING: Cabinet

DATE: 02 May 2023

TITLE	Household Support Fund (April 2023 – March 2024)		
Ward(s)	All		
Author: Matthew Kendall	Job title: Benefits Technical Manager		
Cabinet lead: Deputy Mayor/Cabinet member for City Economy, Finance and Performance, Cllr Cheney	Executive Director lead: Stephen Peacock		
Proposal origin: Other			
Decision maker: Cabinet Member			
Decision forum: Cabinet			
Purpose of Report: To seek approval for the proposed allocation of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) £8m Household Support Fund.			
Evidence Base: Further to the continuing Cost of Living crisis, the government announced there would be a fourth round of the Household Support Fund to cover the period April 2023 to March 2024, with a further £1 billion (£842m for England) being released to 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. This funding is for a whole year as opposed to previous versions which have been for six months only. This 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 has been confirmed at £8,079,930. The period of the grant is from April 2023 to March 2024 and payment is made to the council, in arrears, based on four management information (MI) returns in; July 2023, October 2023, January 2024 and April 2024, and the amounts committed at the point of their return. Payment will be made in arrears after each interim returns and the final MI return at the end of April 2024. Local authorities are required to outline their spending plans to the DWP by 17 May 2023. The eligibility criteria are contained in 3.2 of the policy in appendix A but the main areas/changes are as below. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Any grant should predominately be used to assist households with the costs of; food, gas/electricity, water, phone/broadband, essential household items (e.g. white goods, beds/beddings, clothing, baby/sanitary products) and housing costs (in exceptional circumstance). • No percentage spend will be linked to households with children and/or pensioners. • For the first time, 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. 			

- Part of the fund must also include an application-based support delivered through the scheme is clearly advertised to residents.

Details regarding how any fund may be implemented are contained within 3.3 of the policy in appendix A as well as proposed spend under section 4, but for 2023/24 has an increased focus on those households with disabilities.

The spend proposal does include a 'residual' amount of £800,000 to be agreed by October 2024, in order to potentially add to existing agreed priorities within the policy, and/or other initiatives, if it is believed they have not been identified to date. These will be further agreed by the Director Finance in consultation with the Cabinet Member and Deputy Mayor; City Economy Finance and Performance.

Due to lack of notice of the final grant award and guidance notes provided by government and the impending May school holidays at this time, an Officer Executive Decision was taken in March 2023 to use £340k of the £8m grant, to assist 23,0000 Free School Meal/Pupil Premium children during the May half term, by awarding a £15 voucher in respect of each child. The spend accounts for £340k of the total allocation, for this week 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.

As part of the provision of Free School Meals vouchers for school holidays in 2023/24, and alongside the same need for the council's Local Crisis and Prevention Fund, plus other council services, this report also seeks approval deliver a corporate wide supermarket food voucher solution of £10m for the financial years 2023/24 and 2024/25. This will cover multiple contracts to assist a variety of different council services but calling off the same framework. This will provide a more efficient and better value solution, as opposed to the plethora of contracts/terms of conditions that currently apply.

Cabinet Member / Officer Recommendations:

That Cabinet:

1. Note the Officer Executive Decision (OED) taken in March 2023 to spend £340k of the Household Support Fund in respect of Free School Meals food vouchers for May 2023 school holidays.
2. Approve the Household Support Fund Policy April 2023 – March 2024 and change of budget to reflect this funding.
3. Authorise the Director Finance in consultation with the Cabinet Member and Deputy Mayor; City Economy Finance and Performance to take all steps required to accept and spend (including procuring and awarding contracts over £500k) the remaining £7.7m of the extended allocation of the DWP Household Support Fund as outlined in Household Support Fund Policy April 2023– March 2024.
4. Approve the procurement of a contract/s to deliver the corporate wide supermarket food voucher contract
5. Authorise the Director of Finance in consultation with the Deputy Mayor with responsibility for Finance, Governance, Property and Culture, to take all the steps necessary to procure and award contracts up to the value of £10m from May 2023 to December 2025

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 who have been impacted by the cost of living crisis and those who have suffered a loss of income as a result of the current economic circumstances.

Consultation Details: None at present.

Background Documents:
[Household Support Fund: guidance for local councils - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/household-support-fund-guidance-for-local-councils)
[Household Support Fund October 2022 - March 2023 November Cabinet Final.pdf \(bristol.gov.uk\)](https://bristol.gov.uk/media/1000000/2023-03-02-household-support-fund-october-2022-march-2023-november-cabinet-final.pdf)

Revenue Cost	£8,079,930	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: Bristol City Council has been allocated £8.08m under the Household Support Fund Grant to provide support to local authorities in England to provide support to household and provide direct assistance to vulnerable households and families with children particularly affected by the increase in the cost of living. The Grant is from April 2023 to March 2024 and paid in arrears.

An emergency decision was taken in March 2023 to assist 23,000 Free School Meal/Pupil Premium children during the May Half term period, by awarding a £15 voucher in respect of each child, i.e. an expenditure amount of £340k.

This paper sets out the proposals for the spend of the remaining £7.7m, which if agreed to will mean that the full amount of the grant received will have been committed. The full breakdown of the proposed spend is set in the table in Appendix A.

The paper is also requesting for authority to go into contracts and approval to undertake all necessary procurement steps related to this expenditure.

This spend is fully met from the grant received and places no additional financial burden on the council.

Finance Business Partner: Olubunmi Kupoluyi, Finance Business Partner. 03 March 2023.

2. Legal Advice: The procurement process must be conducted in line with the 2015 Procurement Regulations 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 12 April 2023

3. Implications on IT: I can see no implications on IT in regard to this activity.

IT Team Leader: Alex Simpson – Senior Solution Architect 02/03/2023.

4. HR Advice: No HR implications evident.

HR Partner: HR Partner: Bryn Williams HR Business Partner 28/02/2023.

EDM Sign-off	Stephen Peacock	08/03/2023
Cabinet Member sign-off	Deputy Mayor/Cabinet member for City Economy, Finance and Performance, Cllr Cheney	20/03/2023
For Key Decisions - Mayor's	Mayor's Office	03/04/2023

Office sign-off		
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Appendix A – Further essential background / detail on the proposal <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Household Support Fund Policy April 2023 – March 2024 • Household Support Fund April 2023 – March 2024 extension - final allocations, and • Household Support Fund (April 2023 – March 2024) – DWP Guidance 	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