

Name of Committee:	Cabinet		
Committee Date:	8 November 2023		
Report Title:	Household Support Fund Discretionary Fund 2023-2024		
Responsible Officer:	Michelle Green		
Cabinet Lead:	Councillor Liz Fairhurst		
Status:	Non-Exempt		
Urgent Decision:	No	Key Decision:	Yes
Appendices:	N/A		
Background Papers:	N/A		
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Report Number:	HBC/053/2023		

Corporate Priorities:

This initiative links with the Councils Wellbeing Priority and will help to prevent homelessness and support the distribution of grants and funds received by the Council.

Executive Summary:

The Council have been allocated £140,000 of funding from the DWP under the 4th Household Support Grant scheme.

The recommended option is to use the funding to clear rent arrears for residents as was carried out successfully in round 3.

There is evidence from the housing associations to support this, and they have supplied us with a possible spend of over £147,000.

An application process will assess those that are eligible for assistance.

Recommendations:

Members are requested to:

1. Approve that the discretionary element of the Household Support Fund of £140,000 is used to support residents with rent arrears to allow them to sustain a tenancy, prevent homelessness or enable a move to a more sustainable tenancy.

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) has allocated £842m to County Councils and Unitary Authorities in England to support those most in need of help with global inflationary challenges and the significantly rising cost of living. This is the 4th round of the Household Support Fund (HSF) and covers the period 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024 inclusive.
- 1.2 Havant Borough Council have been allocated £609,210.43 in total. With £449,240 allocated for Food Vouchers and £140,000 for the discretionary Exceptional Housing Element of the fund. The remaining £19,970.43 is to assist administering the scheme. Authorities have the flexibility within the discretionary element of the fund to identify which vulnerable households are in most need of support and apply their own discretion when identifying eligibility. There is guidance issued and we have spoken to Hampshire County Council regarding conditions for spend.
- 1.3 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 and who require crisis support.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 The Household Support Grant (round 4) is split into 2 areas: Funding for Food Vouchers and Exceptional Housing (Discretionary element where councils can use the remaining funds as they see best fit)
- 2.2 Funding for Food Vouchers is non-discretionary. Officers have completed the background analysis and are finalising the distribution and communications channels.
- 2.3 The Household Support Fund guidance states that *'In exceptional cases of genuine emergency, where existing housing support schemes do not meet this exceptional need, The Fund can be used to support housing costs. Where eligible, ongoing housing support for rent must be provided through the Housing cost element of Universal Credit and Housing Benefit rather than The Fund. In addition,*

eligibility for Discretionary Housing Payments must first be considered before emergency housing support is offered through The Fund'. In exceptional cases of genuine emergency, households in receipt of Housing Benefit, Universal Credit, or Discretionary Housing Payments can still receive housing cost support through The Fund if it is deemed necessary by their Authority. However, The Fund should not be used to provide housing support on an ongoing basis or to support unsustainable tenancies.

3.0 Options

- 3.1 **White Goods** - The option of funding white goods was explored but dismissed as a costly, time consuming and difficult option to administer and deliver on the ground. Concerns included the scope of white goods covered, how residents evidence their need and the application and supply processes. In addition, there is little or no data available on the likely demand/need which could lead to a significant underspend or excess demand the council would be unable to meet.
- 3.2 **Food Vouchers** - The guidance does not allow for us to use this element of the funding for this purpose.
- 3.3 **Rent Arrears** – The last round of Household Support Fund was used for clearing rent arrears for those that met the criteria. The process was seen as efficient and fair. Liaising with local Housing Associations, Guinness, Vivid and Two Saints it is apparent there are many in the Borough that are in desperate need of support with rent arrears and that it could help sustain a tenancy for many. We are aware that we have claimants that have rent arrears and potentially could lose their home. We have residents within our borough that have total estimated rent arrears to the total value of £147,856.32. Support in helping sustain tenancies will help avoid costs to the Council downstream relating to Bed and Breakfast payments and homelessness. Noting the Council receives a minimal subsidy or grant for temporary accommodation.

4.0 Relationship to the Corporate Strategy

- 4.1 This initiative links with the Councils Wellbeing Priority, helping to support families suffering from the cost-of-living crisis. Supporting those under pressure to retain their homes, prevent homelessness and the reduce the associated financial pressure on the Council.

5.0 Conclusion

- 5.1 Several options were considered but the recommended option to support residents with rent arrears satisfies the criteria for the discretionary element of The Fund and the represents the most effective and efficient approach for the Council to distribute the funds.

6.0 Implications and Comments

6.1 S151 Comments

As the scheme is fully funded, I have no financial concerns and there are no financial risks. Members may wish to assure themselves that this is the best use of the available grant funding. However, given the current cost of living crisis, this would be a sensible use of the funds to support our residents and help in preventing them falling into further financial difficulties.

6.2 Financial Implications

There are no financial implications to the Council as the scheme is funded.

6.3 Monitoring Officer Comments

Constitutionally, the receipt and expenditure of grant funding is a matter for determination by the Cabinet.

6.4 Legal Implications

The Council has a general power under section 1 of the Localism Act 2011 to do anything an individual may generally do provided it is not prohibited by other legislation and the power is exercised in accordance with the limitations specified in the Act. Therefore, the

Council is able to receive and accept the grant and utilise it as per the contents of the report and in line with the principles set out in government guidance.

6.5 Equality and Diversity

All groups will be included in the application process for the funding.

6.6 Human Resources

There are no HR implications.

6.7 Information Governance

The proposed approach will operate within existing Information governance and GDPR protocols and policies.

6.8 Climate and Environment

There are no climate or environmental implications

7.0 Risks

- 7.1 There is a risk we will have unused delegated funds by March 2024. This will be mitigated by working with the relevant housing associations, asking for the details of those in need of the fund and ensuring people are fully aware of their ability to apply for these funds. This will be via the Housing Association and web pages and social media communications.

8.0 Consultation

- 8.1 Consultation has taken place between Hampshire County Council and the local Housing Associations and landlords.

9.0 Communications

- 9.1 For those eligible there will be an application process. Some will be identified via the Client team and requests for discretionary payments.

Agreed and signed off by:	Date:
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Cabinet Lead:		
Executive Head:		
Monitoring Officer:		
Section151 Officer:		