



Council name	<b>COTSWOLD DISTRICT COUNCIL</b>
Name and date of Committee	<b>Urgent decision by the Chief Executive Officer</b>
Report Number	
Subject	<b>Household Support Fund</b>
Wards affected	People living in all wards have the potential to be impacted in a positive way.
Accountable member	CLlr Joe Harris, Leader of the Council Email: <a href="mailto:joe.harris@cotswold.gov.uk">joe.harris@cotswold.gov.uk</a>
Accountable officer	Robert Weaver, Chief Executive Officer Email: <a href="mailto:robert.weaver@cotswold.gov.uk">robert.weaver@cotswold.gov.uk</a>
Summary/Purpose	This report provides an overview of the Household Support Fund grant, made available by Government to Gloucestershire County Council, and the proposed use of the allocation offered to Cotswold District Council.
Annexes	Annex A – DWP Guidance on eligible expenditure
Recommendation(s)	<i>It is recommended that:</i> <i>a) The £130,518 grant allocation from Gloucestershire County Council is accepted;</i> <i>b) The proposed use of the grant within Cotswold District is approved.</i>
Corporate priorities	Helping residents and communities access the support they need for good health and wellbeing
Key Decision	NO
Exempt	NO
Consultees/ Consultation	In reaching a decision the Chief Executive Officer has consulted with: <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Leader</li><li>2. Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance</li><li>3. Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing</li><li>4. Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee</li><li>5. Leader of the Conservative Group</li></ol>



## **1. BACKGROUND**

- 1.1 In early October the Government announced that a new Household Support Fund (HSF) grant will be made available to County Councils and Unitary Authorities in England to provide support to vulnerable households in most need of support this winter as the economy recovers.
- 1.2 This new grant runs until 31 March 2022 and totals £500m. Gloucestershire County Council has been allocated £3,692,483 and it has been agreed that £123,082 be allocated to each of the six District Councils to design support initiatives most appropriate for their area.
- 1.3 At least 50% of the total funding must be spent on families with children, with the expectation that it should primarily be used to support households in the most need with food, energy and water bills. It can also be used to support households with essential costs related to those items and with wider essential costs. In exceptional cases of genuine emergency it can additionally be used to support housing costs where existing housing support schemes do not meet this exceptional need.
- 1.4 District Councils must use the funding within the guidelines as set out in Annex A.
- 1.5 Cotswold District Council (CDC) has applied for an allocation of £130,518.50, which has been approved by Gloucestershire County Council.
- 1.6 In addition to the proposed local scheme as set out below, residents will be able to access support through the scheme that Gloucestershire County Council is delivering. This includes support with wider essentials not linked to food, energy and water, such as housing support as well as more holistic needs that can't be met through the limited allocation provided to the Council.

## **2. PROPOSED USAGE FOR THE COTSWOLD DISTRICT ALLOCATION**

### **2.1 Support for families with children**

This support will be directed at families that have been impacted by the pandemic where the support is likely to make a lasting and sustainable difference.

- 2.1.1 This support would be delivered by Citizens Advice (CA) due to their expertise and existing relationships with clients as well as with other support organisations in the area.
- 2.1.2 Support will include:
  - FoodSupermarket vouchers for families:
  1. Aldi: £35
  2. Coop £40Approx. total number of vouchers = 500  
Vouchers will be purchased by CDC and made available to CA.  
Total cost: £18,750.00



- Other essentials including:
  - Energy and water. The Fund should also primarily be used to provide support with energy bills for any form of fuel that is used for the purpose of domestic heating, cooking or lighting, including oil or portable gas cylinders. It can also be used to provide support with water bills including for drinking, washing, cooking, and sanitary purposes and sewerage.
  - Essentials linked to energy and water (including sanitary products, warm clothing, soap, blankets, boiler service/repair, purchase of equipment including fridges, freezers, ovens, etc.), in recognition that a range of costs may arise which directly affect a household's ability to afford or access food, energy and water

Total cost: £36,868.50

Total allocation provided to Citizens Advice: £55,618.50

2.1.3 In addition, the Council will provide starter packs x12 (£425.00 each) for homeless families. These clients would be moving from temporary accommodation with nothing to a permanent tenancy; the pack would include the following:

- Microwave
- Bedding
- Small table top fridge
- Plates, cups, cutlery
- Towels
- Cooking utensils

Total cost: £5,100

**Total allocation to households with children: £60,718.50** (does not include admin cost)

## 2.2 Support for other households

A portion of the fund has been allocated to support people in receipt of Housing Benefit, Council Tax Support (or both) and Pension Credit (Savings or Guaranteed). The Council will identify and contact eligible residents and provide food vouchers in the amount of £45.

Total cost: £58,500 (based on 1300 awards)



The Council will also provide starter packs x16 (£300.00 each) for homeless single households. These clients would be moving from temporary accommodation with nothing to a permanent tenancy and the pack would include the items shown at 2.1.3.

Total cost: £4,800

**Total allocation to other households: £63,300.00** (does not include admin cost)

### 2.3 Scheme administration

A total of £6,500 will be used to cover reasonable administration costs to enable delivery of the proposed scheme, with £5,500 to support Citizens Advice and £1,000 to cover postage and support from the customer services and housing teams.

## 3. COUNCIL CONSTITUTION

- 3.1 At its 14 July 2021 meeting Council adopted a refresh of the Constitution, with an updated Responsibility for Functions section (Part C).
- 3.2 Within Part C, a Key Decision is defined as an Executive decision that is likely to:
1. result in the local authority incurring expenditure which is, or the making of savings which are, significant having regard to the budget for the service or function to which the decision relates; or
  2. be significant in terms of its effects on communities living or working in an area comprising two or more electoral divisions in the area of the authority.
- 3.3 The Council has decided that something is financially significant for these purposes if it is an Executive decision which requires a budget expenditure of £150,000 or more or generates savings of £150,000 or more. The grant award from the Household Support Fund is below this threshold.
- 3.4 The Chief Executive, with guidance from the Monitoring Officer, will decide whether a decision will have a significant impact on two or more wards. In considering whether a decision is likely to be 'significant', he, she or they should consider the strategic nature of the decision and whether the outcome will have an impact, for better or worse, on the amenity of a community or quality of service provided by the council to a significant number of people living or working in the locality affected. The following should be considered:
- the effect on businesses and communities
  - the expectation of the public and councillors as to whether the decision should be taken by the Cabinet
  - the anticipated interest of the public and of councillors
  - the effect on other council services and functions



- 3.5 The proposed scheme has the potential to benefit approximately 2,500 households out of 39,400 in the District (Office for National Statistics) with a positive, but short term impact.
- 3.6 The Chief Executive Officer has therefore deemed this is not a Key Decision.
- 3.7 Within the table of Executive functions the Leader, or responsible Cabinet Member, may make a bid for funding with resource implications exceeding £100,000 and not exceeding £150,000. The £130,518 grant falls within these thresholds.
- 3.8 The Chief Executive Officer can take an urgent decision in respect of an Executive Function (excluding a key decision) in a situation where there is not sufficient time for a report to be considered by the Leader or Cabinet Member. Wherever possible this shall be done in consultation with the Leader and Cabinet Member (where not the Leader). The decision shall be reported to the next scheduled ordinary Cabinet meeting.

#### **4. THE NEED FOR AN URGENT DECISION**

- 4.1 This Council's proposed scheme was approved by Gloucestershire County Council on 10 December 2021, which did not allow sufficient time for an item to be added to the Leader Decision Making forward plan.
- 4.2 The funding has to be spent by 31 March 2022 and given the primary focus of the scheme to provide support to vulnerable households in most need of support this winter there is a strong desire to mobilise support ahead of Christmas, particularly food for families with children.
- 4.3 The Chief Executive Officer has also considered the risks outlined in section 7 of this report.
- 4.4 In line with the Constitution, after taking of this urgent decision the Leader will provide a full report to the next available Cabinet meeting explaining the decision, the reasons for it and why it was treated as urgent.

#### **5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 The scheme will be delivered by using external funding and its proposed use is compatible with the Council's aim of helping residents and communities to access the support they need for good health and wellbeing. There is no match funding requirement and the Council's reasonable administration costs to enable delivery of the proposed scheme will be covered by the grant.

#### **6. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 There are no legal implications arising directly from the report.



## **7. RISK ASSESSMENT**

- 7.1** There is a reputational risk to the Council if the district allocation won't be accepted and no local scheme is delivered. All other five districts have accepted the offer and most schemes are already being implemented/delivered.
- 7.2** In the event the decision is delayed until the next Cabinet meeting, the Council will be unable to spend the full allocation by the end of March 2022 with the result of the most vulnerable people in our communities not getting the support they need over the winter months.
- 7.3** Should there be lower than anticipated take-up, the remaining funding allocation needs to be returned to Gloucestershire County Council.

## **8. EQUALITIES IMPACT**

- 8.1** The scheme has been designed to be open and inclusive to all geographical communities and communities of interest. Support will be given to those most in need in line with the eligibility criteria.

## **9. CLIMATE AND ECOLOGICAL EMERGENCIES IMPLICATIONS**

- 9.1** None identified specific to this report.

## **10. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS**

- 10.1** Not delivering a local scheme and rejecting the funding allocation. Support would only be provided through GCC directly.

## **11. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- 11.1** None

(END)



## Annex A

### DWP Guidance on eligible expenditure

1. District Councils must use the funding within the following guidelines.
2. At least 50% of the total funding will be ring-fenced to support households with children, with up to 50% of the total funding to other households genuinely in need of support this winter. This may include households not currently in receipt of DWP welfare benefits.
3. Eligible spend includes:
  - Food. The Fund should primarily be used to provide support with food whether in kind or through vouchers or cash.
  - Energy and water. The Fund should also primarily be used to provide support with energy bills for any form of fuel that is used for the purpose of domestic heating, cooking or lighting, including oil or portable gas cylinders. It can also be used to provide support with water bills including for drinking, washing, cooking, and sanitary purposes and sewerage.
  - Essentials linked to energy and water. The Fund can be used to provide support with essentials linked to energy and water (including sanitary products, warm clothing, soap, blankets, boiler service/repair, purchase of equipment including fridges, freezers, ovens, etc.), in recognition that a range of costs may arise which directly affect a household's ability to afford or access food, energy and water.
  - Wider essentials. The Fund can be used to provide support with wider essential needs not linked to energy and water should Authorities consider this appropriate in their area. These may include, but are not limited to, support with other bills including broadband or phone bills, clothing, and essential transport-related costs such as repairing a car, buying a bicycle or paying for fuel. This list is not exhaustive.
  - Housing Costs. 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 (UC) and Housing Benefit (HB) rather than the Household Support Fund. In addition, eligibility for Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs) must first be considered before emergency housing support is offered through the Household Support Fund. The Authority must also first consider whether the claimant is at statutory risk of homelessness and therefore owed a duty of support through the Homelessness Prevention Grant (HPG).



- In exceptional cases of genuine emergency, households in receipt of HB, UC, or DHPs can still receive housing cost support through the Household Support 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.
  - Individuals in receipt of some other form of housing support could still qualify for the other elements of the Household Support Fund, such as food, energy, water, essentials linked to energy and water and wider essentials.
  - The Fund cannot be used to provide mortgage support, though homeowners could still qualify for the other elements of the Fund (such as food, energy, water, essentials linked to energy and water and wider essentials). Where a homeowner is having difficulty with their mortgage payments, they should contact their lender as soon as possible to discuss their circumstances as lenders will have a set procedure to assist.
  - The Fund can exceptionally and in genuine emergency be used to provide support for historic rent arrears built up prior to an existing benefit claim for households already in receipt of Universal Credit and Housing Benefit. This is because these arrears are excluded from the criteria for Discretionary Housing Payments. However, support with rent arrears is not the primary intent of the fund and should not be the focus of spend.
4. Eligible spend does not include:
- Advice services such as debt advice;
  - Mortgage costs.
5. If the District Council incurs any of the following costs, they must be excluded from eligible expenditure:
- a) contributions in kind,
  - b) payments for activities of a political or exclusively religious nature,
  - c) depreciation, amortisation or impairment of fixed assets,
  - d) input VAT reclaimable from HM Revenue & Customs,
  - e) interest payments or service charge payments for finance leases,
  - f) gifts, other than promotional items with a value of no more than £10 in a year to any one person,
  - g) entertaining (entertaining for this purpose means anything that would be a taxable benefit to the person being entertained, according to current UK tax regulations), or
  - h) statutory fines, criminal fines or penalties,





and, for the avoidance of doubt, the exclusions at a) and f) above do not apply to the provision of direct assistance, including food, to the intended eligible beneficiaries of the Scheme.

6. The District Council must not deliberately incur liabilities for eligible expenditure before there is an operational need for it to do so.
7. Deadlines for the return of the DWP Statement of Grant Usage

The District Council must prepare and return using the DWP template Statement of Grant Usage template attached:

- a) for activity and expenditure from the start of the grant to 6th October 2021 to 31st December 2021 inclusive and return to the Gloucestershire County Council by 5pm 14th January 2022.
- b) for activity and expenditure from the start of the grant to 6th October 2021 to 31st March 2022 inclusive and return to the Gloucestershire County Council by 5pm 8th April 2022.

8. DWP guidance on Records to be kept

The District Council must maintain reliable, accessible and up to date accounting records with an adequate audit trail for all expenditure funded by grant monies under this Determination.