

EXECUTIVE

A meeting of the Executive was held on Wednesday 14 May 2025.

PRESENT: Mayor C Cooke (Chair) and Councillors P Gavigan, L Henman, P Storey and N Walker

OFFICERS: D Alaszewski, C Benjamin, S Bonner, B Carr, G Field, L Grabham, R Horniman, A Humble and E Scollay

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE: Councillors T Furness, J Ryles and J Thompson

24/103 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest received at this point in the meeting.

24/104 **MINUTES - EXECUTIVE - 30 APRIL 2025**

The minutes of the Executive meeting held on 30 April 2025 were submitted and approved as a correct record.

The Mayor requested that updates contained in reports needed to be included within the actions section of Executive reports and if those actions could then be included on forthcoming Executive Forward Plans.

24/105 **HOUSEHOLD SUPPORT FUND 2025/2026**

The Executive Member for Finance submitted a report for Executive's consideration.

The purpose of the report was to seek approval for the Household Support Fund (HSF) scheme for the 2025/26 financial year. In addition, the report sought delegated authority be provided to the Director of Finance and Transformation, in consultation with the Executive Member for Finance, to make any modifications or minor revisions to the scheme and make decisions in respect of any remaining funds to ensure they were distributed in line with the guidance and within the defined timescales.

On 30 October 2024, the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions announced the HSF would be extended for a further 12 months from 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026.

Each Local Authority was required to prepare a local scheme to determine how the funding would be provided and be allocated. The grant amount allocated to Middlesbrough was £2,914,447.24. Government guidance required Local Authorities to clearly advertise the scheme to residents, including publication on the Council website.

The value of individual awards was to be determined by Local Authorities in accordance with the parameters set out in the guidance.

The proposed scheme was based on the Council's previous successful HSF schemes and included an amount for pensioners who were no longer eligible for the state Winter Fuel Payment under the changed criteria introduced in 2024. The scheme was designed to support vulnerable residents and low-income households which included children, pensioners, people with disabilities and other households who may be experiencing financial difficulties brought about by the economic challenges. The proposed scheme was set out in Table 1 in the report.

Estimated expenditure equated to £2.681m, excluding administration costs. In line with the guidance, the Council was able to recover administration costs to deliver the scheme and those had been calculated at £0.233m. This equated to 8% of the scheme funding which was consistent with the level involved with the previous HSF scheme and plan.

Any remaining funds following implementation of the delivery plan, and administrative costs, would be allocated to Council Tax accounts with a current award of Council Tax Reduction

(CTR) and where an outstanding balance remained following the issue of a summons in the 2025/26 financial year. The criteria may also be widened to incorporate accounts not in receipt of CTR.

The scheme had been designed to provide support across the defined 12-month period available to make awards. The scheme would be subject to six-monthly reviews to allow alterations to be made, should the scheme requirements change to keep pace with events and demand.

Appropriate counter fraud measures would be put in place to minimise risk in accordance with the Council's policies and procedures Counter fraud.

A discussion took place about how this initiative, and others like it, could be publicised among communities. It was discussed that Ward Councillors had a key role to play in such publicity.

OPTIONS

Do nothing; however, without a suitable scheme with sufficient defined criteria approved by the Council's Executive, Section 151 Officer and presented to the DWP, the funds could not be used by the Council to benefit vulnerable residents and low-income households.

Funding could be distributed differently amongst the groups identified or across different groups. The plan presented had taken account of the government guidance and experience gained through prior schemes to ensure maximum reach to those in need of support.

ORDERED that Executive:

- 1. Approves the HSF delivery plan for 2025/6, which would be delivered between 1 April 2025 and 31 March 2026 as set out in Table 1 (paragraph 4.7) to target the main groups below where each had a Council Tax or rental liability for their home:**
 - **Families with children in receipt of benefits.**
 - **Pensioners in receipt of Council Tax Reduction but not eligible for the Winter Fuel Payment (who could this year receive the full amount of the Winter Fuel Payment from HSF)**
 - **Pensioners who were not in receipt of Council Tax Reduction subject to the qualifying criteria (listed in table 1, para 4.7).**
 - **Singles/Couples which includes those of pensionable age in receipt of benefits.**
 - **Application-based awards for residents not in receipt of CTR or other benefits.**
- 2. Approves that any remaining funds following implementation of the delivery plan were allocated to Council Tax accounts, with a then current award of CTR and where an outstanding balance remained following the issue of a summons in the 2025/26 financial year. The Council also reserved the right to widen the group to include those accounts not in receipt of CTR.**
- 3. Approves that delegated authority be provided to the Director of Finance and Transformation in consultation with the Executive Member for Finance to make any modifications or minor revisions to the scheme and make decisions in respect of any remaining funds to ensure they are distributed in line with the guidance and within the defined timescales.**

REASONS

The urgent decision was required as Central Government had only recently advised of a further round of the HSF. This funding had been due to end on 31 March 2025, the guidance on this was not provided until 19 March 2025, and the HSF delivery plan must be submitted to the DWP by the 30 May 2025, hence the short timescale for implementation.

Under paragraph 7.25.2 of the constitution, provision was made, under exceptional circumstances, for an urgent decision to be implemented immediately upon a decision being taken and a call-in is therefore not possible. If the HSF plan was subject to a valid call-in, the earliest date for this to be considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Panel would be beyond the deadline date of 30 May 2025. This would then have meant that the Council would be unable to access grant funding of £2,914,447.24 which was available to provide crisis support to vulnerable households in most need with the cost of essentials.

The Council needed to confirm an approach and submit an approved delivery plan to the DWP by 30 May 2025 for awards to be made between 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026.

It was a key decision that impacted on two or more wards and would incur expenditure above £250,000.

The minor amendments that may have been required would result in no changes to the threshold to services and support provided.

That delegated authority was provided to the Director of Finance and Transformation in consultation with the Executive Member for Finance to make any modifications or minor revisions to the scheme and make decisions in respect of any remaining funds to ensure they were distributed in line with the guidance and within the defined timescales.

24/106

ANY OTHER URGENT ITEMS WHICH IN THE OPINION OF THE CHAIR, MAY BE CONSIDERED.

The Mayor, and Executive, expressed their thanks to Councillor Janet Thompson for her hard work and dedication as Executive Member for Neighbourhoods.

The decision will come into force immediately as the decision was considered under urgency provisions.