

Report of:	Director of Finance
Submitted to:	Executive Member for Finance and Governance
Date:	20 April 2023
Title:	Household Support Fund 2023/24
Report for:	Decision
Status:	Public
Strategic priority:	Vulnerability
Key decision:	Yes
Why:	Decision(s) will incur expenditure or savings above £150,000 and have a significant impact in two or more wards
Urgent:	Yes
Why:	The plan is subject to Executive and S151 Officer approval and must be confirmed to the DWP by 17 May 2023.

Executive summary

This report outlines the basis on which the Council should adopt a new scheme for the Household Support Fund. Funding of £3.3 million has been provided by Central Government, the funds are to be distributed to Residents of the town between April 23 and March 24.

The report recommends that the Executive Member for Finance and Governance approves the adoption of a scheme based on the Central Government guidance dated 27 February 2023 for the year commencing 01 April 2023.

There is no financial impact to the Council. As individual portfolio holder for Finance and Governance, the Executive Member is responsible as per the constitution scheme of delegation for approval of such policies, **plans and strategies** which are not part of the financial and policy framework.

Without this decision, Middlesbrough residents cannot benefit from the funds provided by Central Government which are intended to support those most in need and to help with the global inflationary challenges and the significant rising cost of living. The alternative would leave the Council open to criticism both by central government and residents, given the express expectation that Councils would use the funding provided.

Purpose

1. The purpose of the report is provide an overview of the scheme as outlined in the delivery plan at Appendix A which requires Executive member approval and Section 151 Officer approval for the financial year April 23 to March 24, based on Central Government guidance dated 27 February 2023. The delivery plan must be communicated to the DWP by 17 May 2023.

Background and relevant information

2. On 17 November 2022 in the Autumn Statement the Chancellor announced, as part of a number of measures to provide help with global inflationary challenges and the significantly rising cost of living, that the Household Support Fund (HSF) would be extended to April 2023 to March 2024.
3. Individual local authorities are expected to adopt a local scheme and determine how the funding provided is to be distributed. The amount provided to Middlesbrough is £3,307,230.00.
4. Guidance provided states that Local Authorities must make sure that the mandatory element of application-based support delivered through the scheme is clearly advertised to residents and is available throughout the majority of the fund period and the scheme must be published on the Council's website.
5. The value of individual awards is to be determined by Local Authorities in accordance with the parameters set out in the guidance.
6. A number of the suggested initiatives are based on previous household support schemes that have worked successfully and which have been endorsed by groups such as financial inclusive groups and other partnering organisations and will follow a similar criteria.

What decision(s) are being recommended?

7. That the Executive Member for Finance and Governance approves the delivery plan required by the Department for Work and Pensions and is as detailed below and subject to Central Government Guidance.
8. Schemes will be implemented generally in accordance with the qualifying criteria applied in the most recent household support scheme. Where the criteria do not exist, or minor adjustments are required to ensure efficient operation then decision making is delegated to the Head of Resident and Business Support.

Rationale for the recommended decision(s)

9. The Council is required to adopt a scheme to allow Middlesbrough residents to benefit from the funding provided to minimise the consequences of the Cost-of-Living Crisis.
10. The attached delivery plan outlines how the funds will be distributed. The scheme is designed to support households with children, pensioners, disabled and other

households who may be experiencing financial difficulties brought about by the cost-of-living increase.

11. Subject to approval awards will be made on the follow basis – see below. Should any funds remain these will be allocated to council tax accounts based on a qualifying criteria which will be determined subject to remaining funds.

Children	Pensioners	Disabled	Other
Households eligible for Free School Meals. £100 payable over 3 payments. (£900k)	In receipt of CTR or Pension Credit Guarantee Application and Automated payment methods. £75.00 single £100.00 for a couple (£295k)	In receipt of higher rate of DLA or enhanced PIP with CTR or HB Automated process. £50.00 per household. (£225k)	Not in receipt of benefits. Telephone Application. Amount to be determined. (£250k)
Application based claim for those in receipt of CTR/UC/HB £100 payable over 3 payments. (£200k)			Community Support (All households composites). Amount to be determined. (£200k)
New Mothers Voucher of £50.00 (£100k)			Homeless Support Amount to be determined (£20k)
Holiday Activities and Food programme. (£59.4k)			Cost of Living Support Initiatives Amount to be determined. (£90k)
Telephone based application for non CTR residents (£250k)			3 rd Party Support Differing amount based on provider. (£210k)
Section 17 Additional Support (£100k)			Advice & Support To be determined. (£40k)
			Housing Benefit/Housing Support To be determined. (£55k)

Anticipated spend circa £3m. Although it should be noted that the above table excludes any administration costs.

12. The scheme has been designed to provide support throughout the year. Payments will be tapered over the course of the year to reduce household dependencies as Central Government have not suggested that support will continue beyond March 2024.

13. The plan will be subject to review periodically to allow alterations to be made should the scheme requirements need to change to keep pace with the cost-of-living crisis.
14. Suitable controls will be put in place to minimise the risk of fraud such as bank account checks. Local Authorities have access to a range of data sources and checks will be carried out against this data to verify identity of recipients. Where fraud is identified appropriate actions will be taken to address this via the council's fraud solution.

Other potential decision(s) and why these have not been recommended

15. Should the Council choose not to implement Central Government intentions, this would leave the Council open to criticism both by Central Government and the residents of the town, given the express expectation that Councils would use the funding available to support the residents of the town in meeting the cost-of-living increase.

Impact(s) of the recommended decision(s)

16. If agreed, the scheme will be implemented with support being provided to some of the town's most vulnerable residents, with an allocation of £3.3m being allocated over the financial year April 23 to March 24.

Legal

17. Central Government guidance provides Local Authorities with the option to set its own scheme through funding provided and whilst there are no legal requirements to implement a scheme, should the Council decline, this would subject the Local Authority to criticism by both Central Government and residents of the town.

Strategic priorities and risks

18. The proposed scheme will contribute as follows to the Council's strategic priorities:

People	Place	Business
<i>Support will be provided to thousands of residents across the town.</i>	<i>The funding will support the Local Economy.</i>	<i>The funding is intended to enhance local spending.</i>

19. The scheme will avoid the small risk of harm to the Council's reputation from failing to support residents who are suffering financial hardship

Human Rights, Equality and Data Protection

20. The proposed scheme has been designed in response to Central Government guidance, and there will be no negative impacts as a result of the decision.

Financial

21. The decision has no cost to the Council as the scheme is fully funded by Central Government.

Actions to be taken to implement the recommended decision(s)

Action	Responsible Officer	Deadline
Implementation of the plan, promoted through various channels.	Janette Savage	Immediately following approval.
Periodic Review of the Scheme	Janette Savage	Every 3 months.

Appendices

22. Delivery Plan (Appendix A) and Impact Assessment

Background papers

Body	Report title	Date
Department for Work and Pensions	Guidance - 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024: Household Support Fund guidance for county councils and unitary authorities in England	2023

Contact: Janette Savage - Head of Resident & Business Support.

Email: Janette_savage@middlesbrough.gov.uk