

MIDDLESBROUGH COUNCIL	
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Report of:	Director of Finance and Transformation (s151 Officer) – Andrew Humble
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Relevant Executive Member:	Executive Member for Finance – Cllr Nicky Walker
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Submitted to:	Executive
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Date:	8 October 2025
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Title:	Household Support Fund 2025/26
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Report for:	Decision
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Status:	Public
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Council Plan priority:	A healthy place
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Key decision:	Yes
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Why:	Decision(s) will incur expenditure or savings above £250,000 and have a significant impact in two or more wards
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Subject to call in?	Yes
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Why:	This is a change to the initial plan approved on 14 May 2025; as spending has already commenced the decision is not urgent and can be subject to call in.
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Proposed decision

That Executive:

- **APPROVES** the following proposed changes to the Household Support Fund (HSF) delivery plan for 2025/26 previously approved by Executive on 14 May 2025, which will be delivered between 1 April 2025 and 31 March 2026, as set out in Table 1 (paragraph 4.9) and that it continues to target the same main groups as before
 - An increase of £10 per child for those in receipt of income based free school meals, Council Tax Reduction (CTR), Universal Credit (UC) or Housing Benefit (HB)
 - Widen the criteria for pensioner support to include all on CTR (previously had to have Pension Credit Guarantee Credit as well) and increase the payment from £50 to £100
 - Increase the amount provided to singles / couples in receipt of benefits from £45/£55 to £75/£100
 - An additional £38,000 to Community Support to assist with crisis applications
 - An additional £17,000 allocated to the provision of third party support

Executive summary

Executive approved the Household Support Fund (HSF) delivery plan on 14 May 2025. Within this plan £340,000 was allocated to Pensioners in receipt of Council Tax Reduction (CTR) or Attendance Allowance (AA) but not eligible for the Winter Fuel Payment (WFP).

On 9 June 2025 Central Government announced that starting from winter 2025 the Winter Fuel Payment would be extended to include most pensioners in England with only those earning over £35,000 having this recouped through the tax system or able to opt out.

As a result of this change, it is proposed to revise the HSF plan to re-distribute £330,000 within the initial allocation to fund enhancements to other elements in the original plan:

- An increase of £10 per child for those in receipt of income based free school meals, CTR, Universal Credit (UC) or Housing Benefit (HB)
- Widen the criteria for pensioner support to include all on CTR (previously had to have Pension Credit Guarantee Credit as well) and increase the payment from £50 to £100
- Increase the amount provided to singles / couples in receipt of benefits from £45/£55 to £75/£100
- An additional £38,000 to Community Support to assist with crisis applications
- An additional £17,000 allocated to the provision of third party support

The Council is required to submit a revised delivery plan to the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) following approval by the Council's Section 151 Officer and Executive Member for Finance if major changes are made during the year.

Executive are being asked to make this decision in accordance with the Constitution at 9.18.6(b) which states that the Mayor has delegated authority to the Executive to make Key Decisions not otherwise delegated by the Mayor.

The delivery plan remains designed to provide support to the town's most vulnerable residents and low-income households who have a Council Tax or rental liability for their home in a similar way as for previous rounds of HSF funding, as outlined below:

- Families with children in receipt of benefits.
- Pensioners in receipt of CTR.
- 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 including those of pensionable age

The full breakdown and associated estimated costs before and after the proposed changes are detailed in Table 1 (paragraph 4.9)

1. Purpose of this report and its contribution to the achievement of the Council Plan ambitions

1.1 To seek approval for changes required to the Household Support Fund (HSF) scheme previously approved for the 2025/26 financial year.

Our ambitions	Summary of how this report will support delivery of these ambitions and the underpinning aims
A successful and ambitious town	<i>Government grant funding distributed through the scheme will flow through into the local economy.</i>
A healthy Place	<i>The scheme supports with reducing poverty by providing funding to low-income households to assist with meeting essential needs.</i>
Safe and resilient communities	<i>Supporting individual residents to meet their essential needs will contribute to community resilience.</i>
Delivering best value	<i>Funding is provided by Central Government and so provision of the scheme has no consequences for the Council's financial position.</i>

2. Recommendations

2.1 That Executive

- **APPROVES** the following proposed changes to the Household Support Fund (HSF) delivery plan for 2025/26 previously approved by Executive on 14 May 2025, which will be delivered between 1 April 2025 and 31 March 2026, as set out in Table 1 (paragraph 4.9) and that it continues to target the same main groups as before
 - An increase of £10 per child for those in receipt of income based free school meals, Council Tax Reduction (CTR), Universal Credit (UC) or Housing Benefit (HB)
 - Widen the criteria for pensioner support to include all on CTR (previously had to have Pension Credit Guarantee Credit as well) and increase the payment from £50 to £100
 - Increase the amount provided to singles / couples in receipt of benefits from £45/£55 to £75/£100
 - An additional £38,000 to Community Support to assist with crisis applications
 - An additional £17,000 allocated to the provision of third party support

3. Rationale for the recommended decision(s)

3.1 The decision is required as Central Government extended eligibility to the Winter Fuel Payment in an announcement on 9 June 2025. £330,000 had already been allocated within the Council's HSF scheme to provide support for those pensioners who were due to miss out but who will now be eligible to receive the Winter Fuel Payment. The Council scheme needs to be amended to ensure that available funding is re-distributed to ensure the maximum support possible is provided locally, otherwise the grant funding available would be lost.

3.2 A revised delivery plan endorsed by the Executive Member for Finance must be submitted to the DWP where significant change is intended.

3.3 It is a key decision that impacts on two or more wards and will incur expenditure above £250,000.

4. Background and relevant information

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

4.2 Each Local Authority is required to prepare a local scheme to determine how the funding will be provided and will be allocated. The grant amount allocated to Middlesbrough is £2,914,447.24.

4.3 Government guidance requires Local Authorities to clearly advertise the scheme to residents, including publication on the Council website.

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

4.5 The current scheme was approved by Executive on 14 May 2025 and is based on the Council's previous successful HSF schemes. The original 2025/26 scheme included a payment amount for pensioners who were no longer eligible for the state Winter Fuel Payment under the changed criteria introduced in 2024. This would have meant that those in receipt of Council Tax Reduction or Attendance Allowance who were not eligible for the Winter Fuel Payment from the Government could have received an equivalent amount to the Winter Fuel Payment in full from Middlesbrough Council's HSF of £300 or £200 depending on age. £340,000 was allocated to enable this to happen.

4.6 On 9 June 2025 the Government amended the criteria for the Winter Fuel Payment again, meaning that pensioners with incomes of less than £35,000 will now be eligible for the Winter Fuel Payment. This has reduced the number of pensioners ineligible to benefit from it, and consequently the number who would be eligible under the previously agreed scheme for the £300 or £200 HSF payment, depending on age. As a result, the HSF funding required in the Council's scheme to meet the reduced need has been reviewed and changes consequently proposed to increase other expenditure by £330,000 as follows:

- An increase of £10 per child for those in receipt of income based free school meals, CTR, Universal Credit (UC) or Housing Benefit (HB)
- Widen the criteria for pensioner support to include all on CTR (previously had to have Pension Credit Guarantee Credit as well) and increase the payment from £50 to £100
- Increase the amount provided to singles / couples in receipt of benefits from £45/£55 to £75/£100
- An additional £38,000 to Community Support to assist with crisis applications
- An additional £17,000 allocated to the provision of third party support

4.7 Those pensioners in receipt of CTR or Attendance Allowance who remain ineligible for the Winter Fuel Payment or are subject to clawback through HMRC would still be eligible for the same level of payment under HSF of £300 or £200, depending on age. Pensioners who are eligible for the Winter Fuel Payment and not subject to clawback may still also be eligible for a payment of £100 from HSF, depending on their circumstances, the rate having been increased from £50 under the amended scheme.

4.8 The scheme remains designed to support vulnerable residents and low-income households which include children, pensioners, people with disabilities and other households who may be experiencing financial difficulties brought about by the continuing economic challenges.

4.9 The full breakdown and associated estimated costs in the scheme before and after the proposed changes are detailed in Table 1.

Table 1 Household Support Fund 2025/26

	Detail	Previous Plan Cost (£m)	Change (£m)	New Plan Cost (£m)
Children (up to age 20 if child benefit received)	Households eligible for free school meals £60 paid per child in both July and £70 per child in December. Total received £130 per child - automated payment	1.250	0.108	1.358
	Application based claim for those in receipt of CTR / UC / HB £60 per child to apply in summer, and £70 per child to apply in winter	0.295	0.025	0.320
	Section 17 Children Act 1989 Additional Support	0.040	0.000	0.040
	Application based claim for non-CTR / non-benefit residents Income eligibility is banded like CTR scheme on household composition £100 per household (see ** below for bandings)	0.050	0.000	0.050
Pensioners (from 66 years old)	In receipt of CTR or AA, and not eligible for the Winter Fuel Payment or subject to clawback through HMRC Born pre 22 September 1945 £300 per household Born between 22 September 1945 and 21 September 1959 £200 per household Application and automated payment methods	0.340	(0.330)	0.010
	Pensioners in receipt of CTR and eligible for the Winter Fuel Payment and not subject to clawback through HMRC £100 per household Application and automated payment methods	0.186	0.112	0.298
	Application based claim for non-CTR / non-benefit pensioners Income eligibility is banded like CTR scheme on household composition £100 per household (see ** below for bandings)	0.050	0.000	0.050
Other	Singles or couples in receipt of CTR / UC / HB (no children and below pension age) £75 single applicant, £100 couple	0.090	0.030	0.120

	Application based claim for non-CTR / non benefit residents (below pension age) Income eligibility is banded like CTR scheme on household composition £100 per household (see ** below for bandings)	0.050	0.000	0.050
	Community Support (All household composites) Application for crisis support	0.062	0.038	0.100
	Third party support	0.268	0.017	0.285
	Sub total	2.681	0.000	2.681
	Administration Costs at 8%	0.233	0.000	0.233
	Total	2.914	0.000	2.914

CTR - Council Tax Reduction; HB - Housing Benefit; UC - Universal Credit

** Banded earnings / income table for applications for residents not in receipt of means-tested benefits:

Earnings	Single	Single 1 child	Single 2+ children	Couple	Couple 1 child	Couple 2+ children
Maximum annual (gross)	£30k	£33k	£40k	£40k	£44k	£51k
Weekly amount	£577	£635	£775	£775	£846	£981

5. Ward Member Engagement if relevant and appropriate

5.1 The Executive Member for Finance has been consulted on the revisions required to the delivery plan. No ward member views have been sought for the proposed changes as these are based on the previously delivered, successful schemes.

6. Other potential alternative(s) and why these have not been recommended

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

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

7. Impact(s) of the recommended decision(s)

Topic	Impact
Financial (including procurement and Social Value)	Central Government has allocated the Council £2,914,447.24 from the Household Support Fund (HSF) as outlined in the Executive summary. With an approved delivery plan the Council can distribute the funds within the

	defined timescale between 1 April 2025 and 31 March 2026 to support the town's most vulnerable and low-income households. The Council can utilise the grant as per the Central Government guidance and will not exceed the grant funding available. All funds will be distributed by 31 March 2026 to comply with the grant conditions. The Council will retain £\0.233m to administer the scheme therefore there will be no direct cost to the Council.
Legal	Central Government guidance provides Local Authorities with the option to set its own scheme using funding provided. Whilst there is no legal requirement to spend the whole grant funding, it would subject the Local Authority to criticism by both Central Government and residents of the town if the Council were not providing the maximum support to vulnerable residents of the town.
Risk	<p>The scheme supports the delivery of the Council's strategic priority 'A Healthy Place' to reduce poverty as set out in the Council Plan 2024-2027. Council Plan Middlesbrough Council.</p> <p>The HSF scheme will assist residents to meet their council tax instalments and debt liabilities, which in turn, will mean that the Council has funding to work with communities and other public services in Middlesbrough to continue to improve the lives of local residents.</p>
Human Rights, Public Sector Equality Duty and Community Cohesion	There are no disproportionate adverse impacts on any group or individuals with characteristics protected in UK equity law. An impact assessment has been carried out and is attached to this report.
Reducing Poverty	The scheme provides funding to low income households, supporting them to meet their essential needs.
Climate Change / Environmental	There are no disproportionate adverse impacts on the aspirations of the Council to achieve net zero, net carbon neutral or be the lead authority on environmental issues.
Children and Young People Cared for by the Authority and Care Leavers	The revised HSF 2025/26 plan does not differentiate based on applicant background and therefore has no adverse impact on children and young people cared for by the Authority for Care Leavers.
Data Protection	The collation and use of personal data will be managed in accordance with the Council's Data Protection policy and the Housing Benefit and Council Tax Reduction Privacy Notice Privacy notice - Housing Benefit and Council Tax Reduction Middlesbrough Council

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

Action	Responsible Officer	Deadline
Implementation and publication of the revised plan	David Nolan	31 October 2025
Advise DWP of the revised delivery plan	David Nolan	31 October 2025

Appendices

1	Delivery plan
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Background papers

Body	Report title	Date
Department for Work and Pensions	Household Support Fund Guidance for County Councils and Unitary Authorities in England (1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026)	11 April 2025
Middlesbrough Council	Household Support Fund 2025/26	14 May 2025

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