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TONBRIDGE & MALLING
BOROUGH COUNCIL

EXECUTIVE SERVICES

Chief Executive

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13 December 2022

Dear Councillor

CABINET - WEDNESDAY, 14TH DECEMBER, 2022

I am now able to enclose, for consideration at the Wednesday, 14th December, 2022 meeting of the Cabinet, the following reports that were unavailable when the agenda was printed.

In accordance with s100B(4) of LGA 1972, the Chair is of the opinion that the following item should be considered as a matter of urgency by reason of special circumstance regarding the funding timescales and distribution to relevant parties before Christmas. The requisite notice has been given to the Chief Executive.

Agenda No Item

- 7 a) Household Support Fund (Round 3) (Pages 3 - 16)

A report seeking approval of the Council's approach in use of the current grant of Household Support Fund for the Borough.

Yours sincerely

J E BEILBY
Chief Executive

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TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET

14 December 2022

Report of the Director of Finance & Transformation

Part 1- Public

Executive Non Key Decisions

1 **HOUSEHOLD SUPPORT FUND (ROUND 3)**

A report seeking approval of the Council's approach in use of the current grant of Household Support Fund for the Borough

1.1 **Background**

- 1.1.1 Government established the Household Support Fund initially as part of the covid recovery financial package. It now forms part of the national cost of living support package to support those most in need across England with the cost of food, energy (heating, cooking, lighting), water bills (including sewerage) and other essentials. This is the third consecutive tranche of funding, each one being attributed to a six month period, this being October 2022 – March 2023.
- 1.1.2 In Kent, the fund has again been allocated to Kent County Council. KCC decided to grant 20% to district councils, according to a distribution model based on population and poverty, to target support in their areas, on conditional agreement of the direction of spend meeting national and local criteria.

1.2 **Grant Award for Tonbridge & Malling Borough**

- 1.2.1 An agreement was made on 15 November for Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council to accept a grant from the fund of £139,263.24 and to use it in accordance with Government criteria and guidance which can be found at:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/household-support-fund-guidance-for-local-councils/household-support-fund-final-guidance-for-county-councils-and-unitary-authorities-in-england>
- 1.2.2 KCC state in the agreement: *There is a requirement for at least part of the Fund to be used on an application basis i.e. residents should have the opportunity to come forward to ask for support. This application based element will be provided by the County Council through the KSAS scheme to minimise the administrative burden, therefore there is no requirement for you to have an application form to access support, rather this is at your discretion. There is an expectation that you have particular consideration for those groups who may not have benefitted from any of*

the recent national cost of living support. Energy bills will be of particular concern to low-income households during the period of the funding, and you should prioritise supporting households with the cost of energy.

1.2.3 Officers have been working with KCC to establish how the county council would put their money to use so as our approach can dovetail, complement and not duplicate that of the county. It was not until mid December that the position became clear and we have been able to progress. A table of KCC intended uses for the funding is at **[Annex 1]**

1.2.4 The grant is to be used by 31 March 2023. Unspent grant cannot be rolled over into April, beyond honouring any expenditure committed to before the end of March.

1.3 Proposed use of Grant

1.3.1 The Council's management team has considered options for a way forward providing the best approach to using funds. There are many draws and good uses without doubt but honing those to produce optimal delivery of the funds is not simple.

1.3.2 We know that foodbanks across the borough are busier than ever and donations are harder to come by. We have previously supported our foodbanks to good effect, so rapid assistance to them is a priority.

1.3.3 Energy and cost of living pressures look set to compound as we go deeper into the winter season. In recognition of this we have withheld putting a proportion of our fund to immediate use. While the KCC scheme operates and foodbanks will be stocked it is anticipated this will be enough to carry a sufficient level of assistance through to the end of January when the landscape can be assessed to identify areas of greatest need. By this time it may be that the KCC fund is exhausted, otherwise leaving little help for February and March, often our coldest months.

1.3.4 Alternatively, there may be additional schemes announced by government to help generally or targeted cohorts. At the time of writing this report we already have had the Energy Bill Support Scheme (EBSS) Alternative Fuel Payments Scheme confirmed, to support households and individuals with energy costs in a similar way to the £400 mainstream EBSS and probably an EBBS Alternative Fuel Payments Alternative Fund! Both of these schemes being national but predominantly administered at a local council level purposely to enable a rapid response.

1.3.5 To that end, our Scheme reflects this position and asks Members to authorise the use of funding for:

- immediate funding to food banks

- funding to partner organisations for the provision of fuel voucher schemes,
 - a contingency element to be immediately available to help households facing a disproportionate impact of cost of living increase or exceptional needs, and
 - remaining funding to be targeted at those identified as most in need when evaluated in late January 2023. The assessment and that decision where to direct funds to be made by the Director of Finance and Transformation, in consultation with Chief Executive, Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Innovation & Property.
- 1.3.6 Funding to foodbanks totalling **£45,000** distributed by negotiation to the network of foodbanks across the Borough, having regard to those areas with highest demand.
- 1.3.7 An allocation of **£20,000** for fuel voucher schemes.
- 1.3.8 To safeguard individual residents the contingency balance initially set at **£25,000** but with a reserved right for Director of Finance and Transformation to increase or reduce the level according to demand in agreement with the Chief Executive, Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Innovation & Property. Use of that contingency will be made with the authorisation of Director of Finance and Transformation and/or the Chief Executive.
- 1.3.9 Cover of reasonable costs based on the time and direct costs incurred by the Revenues & Benefits Service and supporting services in administering the fund.
- 1.3.10 The balance of funding to be targeted at those identified as most in need when evaluated in late January. The assessment and that decision where to direct funds to be made by the Director of Finance & Transformation with Chief Executive, Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Innovation and Property.
- 1.3.11 Most importantly, it is believed that budgeting the spend in this way will allow the Borough Council to remain flexible, adaptive and retain the ability to quickly react to needs as they arise through the winter months.
- 1.3.12 The proposals are set out in the draft Scheme document set out at **[Annex 2]** entitled 'Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council Household Support Fund Scheme October 2022 – March 2023'. As part of this report, Members are asked to approve the Scheme.

1.4 Resource Implications

- 1.4.1 This approach takes a relatively low resourcing level, which is anticipated as achievable within existing resources.

1.5 Legal Implications

- 1.5.1 The Scheme complies with Government guidance and the agreement with KCC signed by the Chief Executive on 15 November 2022.

1.6 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

- 1.6.1 A stepped approach to spend will allow the scheme to be adaptive through evaluated iterations and promote evenly distributed support across the entire period of allocation.
- 1.6.2 Reasonable administration costs incurred in operating this scheme may be met from the grant allocations. These costs may include:
- staff costs
 - advertising and publicity to raise awareness of the scheme
 - web page design
 - printing application forms and postage costs
 - small IT changes, for example, to facilitate MI production

With administration costs being met from the allocations it is imperative to run a scheme as efficiently as can be to maximise the level of financial support available to households. A reasonable administrative charge to deliver this scheme is estimated at £3000.

1.7 Risk Assessment

- 1.7.1 A policy statement / Scheme will reduce the risk of challenge in the operation of the scheme.
- 1.7.2 Financial exposure is limited, the budget for the Scheme, including administration, is restricted to the level of grant from KCC. Payment from KCC is retrospective and reliant on the provision of agreed monitoring and management information.

1.8 Equality Impact Assessment

- 1.8.1 Members are reminded of the requirement, under the Public Sector Equality Duty (section 149 of the Equality Act 2010) to have due regard to (i) eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Equality Act 2010, (ii) advance equality of opportunity between people from different groups, and (iii) foster good relations between people from different groups. The decisions recommended through this paper directly impact on end users. The impact has been analysed and varies between groups of people. The results of this analysis are set out immediately below.

- 1.8.2 There is no perceived inequality towards protected characteristic groups by the operation of the scheme. It is targeted generally at residents most vulnerable to the rise in living costs in accordance with government guidance. Any inequality towards individuals that presents may be mitigated through the use of the contingency budget to be used at the discretion of the Chief Executive and Director of Finance & Transformation.
- 1.8.3 In using local foodbanks the Borough Council can tap into services at a local community level that have been established to meet local community needs.

1.9 Recommendation

- 1.9.1 Members are **RECOMMENDED** to approve the Household Support Fund Scheme October 2022 – March 2023 at **Annex 2**, granting authority for the Director of Finance & Transformation to establish an effective operational scheme to disburse funds in accordance with detail in that Policy.

Background papers:

Nil

contact: Andrew Rosevear
Benefits & Welfare Manager

Sharon Shelton
Director of Finance & Transformation

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Annex 1

The table below shows how KCC intends to target vulnerable households.

Provision of support, and rationale	How it is targeted and accessed	Comments
Supermarket vouchers during the Christmas, February and Easter school holidays, to support low income families whose children would be receiving a daily meal when at school, but need to be fed at home during the school holidays.	<p>All families in receipt of benefits-related Free School Meals (FSM) will automatically receive vouchers, without having to apply.</p> <p>Children who currently do not have a school place but are known to meet the criteria will automatically receive vouchers.</p> <p>Processes are being put in place to identify vulnerable children who meet the benefits-related FSM criteria but who are not in school (either elective home education or children missing education)</p> <p>Children receiving Early Years Pupil Premium and Free for Two services will also receive vouchers – parents will be contacted directly by.</p>	There may be families with children in Yr 2 or below who have not registered for benefits-related FSM because all young children automatically receive FSM. These families will be encouraged to apply so that they can receive the vouchers (and also schools will then receive Pupil Premium for those children).
Funding to District and Borough Councils to support vulnerable households, distributed on the same population/deprivation formula used by DWP to allocate the Fund.	<p>This will be locally targeted at families known to District Council staff or the voluntary organisations they are working with.</p> <p>To include families in temporary accommodation</p> <p>To include vulnerable adults without children</p>	<p>Some of this funding will be used to enhance Food Bank provision, alongside the Government's additional support to Food Banks.</p> <p>Districts will work with particular groups, for example those with very high levels of deprivation or other characteristics that make them more vulnerable during Covid.</p>

	To be targeted at those local communities facing particularly severe deprivation.	
Funding for vulnerable households via KCC services	<p>Kent Support and Assistance Service will be the key vehicle for distributing support from KCC. The following groups should also be targeted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early years – from pregnancy to age 2, as they will not be getting Free School Meal vouchers. • Care Leavers • Disabled young adults (18-24) • Young Carers • People with No Recourse to Public Funds • Families with multiple challenges • Adults with Disabilities 	<p>Adult Social Care will identify vulnerable adults they are supporting in the community</p> <p>Health Visitors and Maternity services will identify vulnerable families with young children and expectant parents who may not otherwise be known to CYPE.</p> <p>Early Help will continue to use their existing signposting - they already identify vulnerable families and help them get the support they need.</p>
Funding to utility companies to reduce fuel and water bills for those in financial hardship.	Criteria will be developed with the utilities companies to focus support on those facing greatest financial hardship.	We will develop a trusted partner status arrangement whereby we agree criteria and the company can then confirm how many households meet that criteria for us to pass the funding to them to deduct from their bills.
Funding for fuel poverty voucher and support scheme	This will be targeted at households who are low income or in financial distress. Access will be through trusted partners such as district and borough councils.	



**Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council
Household Support Fund Scheme
October 2022 – March 2023**

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1.0 Purpose of the Scheme and background.

- 1.1** The purpose of this document is to set out the Council's intended use of the grant of Household Support Fund from Kent County Council to 31 March 2023.
- 1.2** Government has provided funding to Kent County Council (KCC). KCC has distributed part of their funding to all district councils across Kent. [Decision - 21/00107 - Household Support Grant \(kent.gov.uk\)](#)
- 1.3** The Council's scheme has been designed based on general guidance issued by the Department for Work & Pensions <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/household-support-fund-guidance-for-local-councils/household-support-fund-final-guidance-for-county-councils-and-unitary-authorities-in-england> and an agreement between Kent County Council and the Council dated 15 November 2022.
- 1.4** The Scheme is part of a national and local package of support for households in hardship through rising energy costs and general rise in costs of living.
- 1.5** The overall objective of the Scheme is to provide support to vulnerable households in most need of support to help with significant rising living costs.

2.0 Funding

- 2.1** KCC has allocated HSF funding to the Council totaling **£139,263.24**
- 2.2** This grant is to be used in the period 1 October 2022 until the end of March 2023. There is no carry forward of this grant into April 2023 beyond honouring any expenditure committed before 31 March 2023.

3.0 Administration costs

- 3.1** Reasonable costs incurred in administering the Scheme will be charged to the fund. These charges may include:
- staff costs
 - advertising and publicity to raise awareness of the scheme
 - web page design
 - printing application forms
 - small IT changes, for example, to facilitate MI production

4.0 Eligibility criteria and awards

- 4.1 The Council supports and adopts the government and KCC statement in that, ‘the intention behind the grant is to meet immediate needs and help those who are struggling to afford food, energy and water bills, and other related essentials. Funding can also be used to support households who are struggling to afford wider essentials. 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.’
- 4.2 The Council has decided that funds will be used in the following ways:
- 4.2.1 Funding to foodbanks totalling £45,000 distributed on negotiation to the network of foodbanks across the Borough, having regard to those areas with highest demand.
 - 4.2.2 An allocation of £20,000 for fuel voucher schemes operated by partnering organisations
 - 4.2.3 A contingency element, amount agreed by Director of Finance & Transformation in consultation with Chief Executive, Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Innovation & Property, to be immediately available to help households facing a disproportionate impact of cost of living increase or exceptional needs, and
 - 4.2.4 The balance of funding to be targeted at those identified as most in need when evaluated in late January. The assessment and that decision where to direct funds to be made by the Director of Finance & Transformation with Chief Executive, Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Innovation and Property.
 - 4.2.5 Cover of reasonable administrative expenses as incurred.

Effective date

- 4.3 The effective date for the scheme to run is 1 October 2022 – 31 March 2023. Payments from the fund must be made or committed to be made by 31 March 2023. Payments will not be made based on any new information received after the close of Scheme. No balances can be rolled forward.

5.0 How payments will be made

- 5.1 Payments made to third party partnering organisations (including foodbanks) or individual households will be made by direct bank credit or at the discretion of the council, another form of payment deemed appropriate.
- 5.2 In all cases, the Council will ensure that payments are made correctly and where

appropriate, require households to verify that that they are eligible for the payment. Where no such verification can be made or where a household fails to respond to the Council's request, no payment shall be made.

- 5.7 Awards to relevant third party organisations will be agreed in consultation and made on condition of meeting Scheme criteria and agreement to provide required management information. Any assistance scheme operated by a relevant third party organisation must demonstrate compliance to the Council's equality duties.
- 5.8 The total fund to be distributed is limited to £139,263.24 or other amount should Kent County Council alter the grant allocation during the period the Scheme is running. Payments will be made promptly by bank transfer to each relevant organisation following agreement.

6.0 Scheme of Delegation

- 6.1 The Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Finance, Innovation & Property have authorised the Director of Finance & Transformation to establish this Scheme as set out in this document. The Scheme must align to criteria set by Government and Kent County Council.
- 6.2 Payments will be limited to the fund provided for these purposes by Kent County Council.

7.0 Further Funding

- 7.1 This policy may be amended by agreement of the Leader of the Council, Cabinet Member for Finance, Innovation & Property, Chief Executive and Director of Finance & Transformation in order to accommodate further grants of Household Support Fund either directly from Government or through Kent County Council.

Any amendments will be compliant to criteria set by Government or Kent County Council and complement other key policies of the Council.

8.0 Reviews of Decisions

- 8.1 The Council will operate an internal review process and will accept a householder's request for a review of its decision. Any such request must be made by writing or email to the Council and should state the reasons why the householder is aggrieved with the decision of the Council. New information may be submitted to support the householder's review within the lifetime of the Scheme.
- 8.2 A request for review will be considered by a senior officer and the householder informed of the final decision. The decision of the Council on any eligibility matter will be final.

9.0 Taxation and the provision of information to Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC)

- 9.1** The Council does not accept any responsibility in relation to a householder's HMRC tax liabilities. All payees should make their own enquiries to establish any tax position.

10.0 Managing the risk of fraud

- 10.1** The Council will not accept deliberate manipulation of this policy or fraud. Any person found to falsify information to gain a payment or goods will face prosecution and any amount awarded or the value of goods will be recovered.

11.0 Recovery of amounts incorrectly paid

- 11.1** If it is established that **any** payment has been made incorrectly due to error by the Council, or error, misrepresentation or incorrect information provided to the Council by any person or partnering organisation, the Council will look to recover the amount in full.

12.0 Data Protection and use of data

- 12.1** All information used to make awards, including information provided by households shall be dealt with in accordance with the Council's Data Protection policy and Privacy Notices which are available on the Council's website.

13.0 Equalities

- 13.1** The Council will operate the Scheme having consideration to the impact of its equality duties.
- 13.2** Consideration of equalities impact will form part of consultations to establish partners to act as third party organisations to support and assist in the fair distribution of the fund.

14.0 Monitoring and Management Information

- 14.1** Spend of the fund will be monitored and reported to KCC in accordance with the agreement between KCC and the Council. Monitoring and reporting, with required return dates will be agreed with relevant third party organisations in order for the Council to report fully to KCC.