

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

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