

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET

04 July 2023

Report of the Director of Finance & Transformation

Part 1- Public

Executive Key Decisions

1 HOUSEHOLD SUPPORT FUND

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 fourth consecutive tranche of funding. Previous awards have been for attributed to six month periods, however the current award covers the period 1 April 2023 – 31 March 2024.
- 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. In a change to those criteria, funding of debt advice which was explicitly prohibited, is now permissible.

1.2 Grant Award for Tonbridge & Malling Borough

- 1.2.1 An agreement was made in April for Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council to accept a grant from the fund of £278,562 and to use it in accordance with Government 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 Officers have been working with KCC to establish how the county council intend to put their money to use so our approach can dovetail, complement and not duplicate that of the county. KCC will continue with similar lines of support provided by previous rounds but in addition there will be funding for the provision of enhanced debt advice services across Kent provided by North West Kent

Citizens Advice. The exact shape and provision of service has not been defined at this time. It is likely to be a telephone service.

- 1.2.3 The grant is to be used by 31 March 2024. 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 draft Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council Household Support Fund Scheme April 2023 – March 2024 **[Annex 1]** sets out the proposed use of the fund. The Scheme objective is to provide crisis support for households. The strategy for direction of funding is based on successful outcomes of previous awards, statistical returns, feedback from a recent welfare support workshop and anecdotal experience.

- 1.3.2 The Finance, Regeneration & Property Scrutiny Select Committee discussed and supports the way forward. Members stressed the need not just in distributing funds to support organisations, but ensuring funds are targeted to those households most in need and to ensure the scheme remains effective to the end. Members were also keen that, where appropriate, the Council takes advantage of any additional funding becoming available from government or KCC to assist our borough. These points have been reflected and addressed in the document.

- 1.3.3 The Scheme sets out the intention to:

- Support local community and charitable foodbanks
- Support organisations in the provision of fuel vouchers (with a focus on the autumn / winter period)
- Support pastoral care for children and parents through local schools
- Support debt advice outreach services across the borough in conjunction with KCC enhanced debt advice service
- Support mental health services for households suffering as a consequence of the economic climate
- Support for community projects that directly help residents in meeting the Scheme objective
- Cover reasonable administrative costs

- 1.3.4 The expectation is for a minimum of 50% funding to be allocated to foodbanks and fuel voucher schemes.

- 1.3.5 The Scheme includes a mechanism to adapt the direction of funds in response to changing or emerging priorities throughout the lifespan.

- 1.3.6 The report has been considered by Management Team who are supportive of the proposals made.

1.4 Resource Implications

- 1.4.1 This approach calls for 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 our Director of Finance & Transformation in April 2023.

1.6 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

- 1.6.1 Spend will be monitored to ensure the minimum 40% is achieved by 30 September, accessing the remaining 60% making optimum use of the funds for the borough.
- 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
- 1.6.3 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.
- 1.7.3 Spend will be monitored throughout with a priority to ensure the minimum spend of 40% is met by 30 September 2023 to release the remainder of the fund.

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.
- 1.8.3 In using local community and charitable foodbanks we tap into services at a local level that have been established to meet local community needs.

1.9 Recommendation

- 1.9.1 Members are **RECOMMENDED** to:

- 1) approve the Household Support Fund Scheme July 2023 – March 2024 at **Annex 1**;
- 2) granting authority for the Director of Finance & Transformation to establish an effective operational scheme to disburse funds in accordance with that document; and
- 3) allowing for significant variance in direction of spend in response to any emerging events or needs over the lifetime of the Scheme by agreement of Leader, Cabinet Member for Finance & Housing, Chief Executive and Director of Finance & Transformation, in line with the general parameters of the Household Support Fund.

Background papers:

Nil

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