

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET

08 July 2024

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 is 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 fifth consecutive tranche of funding. Like all but the last award – awarded for a twelve-month period – the current award is for six months and covers the period 1 April 2024 - 30 September 2024.

1.1.2 In Kent, the fund has again been allocated to Kent County Council. KCC has decided to grant 20% to district councils, adopting the same rationale used previously.

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 £139,263 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 As for previous iterations of the scheme, 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 and as was the case in 2023/24, provision of debt advice will be provided by North West Kent Citizens Advice.

1.2.3 The grant is to be used by 30 September 2024. Unspent grant cannot be carried forward beyond that date.

1.3 Proposed use of Grant

1.3.1 The draft Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council Household Support Fund Scheme April 2024 - September 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 and experience.

1.3.2 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; and
- Cover reasonable administrative costs.

1.3.3 All of the schemes and third part organisations supported by this grant will be within the Tonbridge & Malling borough to ensure that the support is targeted towards local residents.

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 2024.

1.6 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

- 1.6.1 Spend will be monitored to ensure the fund is spent effectively by 30 September 2024 in accordance with the objectives of the scheme, listed at 1.3.2.
- 1.6.2 Reasonable administration costs incurred in operating this scheme may be met from the grant allocations. 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 will not exceed £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 the life of the scheme.

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 April 2024 - September 2024 at **Annex 1**;
- 2) grant authority for the Director of Finance & Transformation to establish an effective operational scheme to disburse funds in accordance with that document; and
- 3) allow 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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