

# Cheltenham Borough Council

## Cabinet

13 June 2023

## Household Support Fund Programme 2023/24

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### Accountable member:

Cllr Flo Clucas Cabinet Member Safety and Communities

### Accountable officer:

Richard Gibson, Head of communities, wellbeing & partnerships

### Accountable scrutiny committee:

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

### Ward(s) affected:

All

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### Key/Significant Decision:

No

### Executive summary:

The Household Support Fund (HSF), first introduced in 2021/22, is funding that is made available via Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) to County Councils and Unitary Authorities in England to support those most in need to help with global inflationary challenges and the significantly rising cost of living.

In total Gloucestershire County Council has been allocated a sum of £7,384,966 for the period 1st April 2023 to 31st March 2024.

The allocation of this funding has been agreed by the [County's cabinet](#) which includes a sum of £1.6m allocated to the six district councils to enable them to provide their own localised schemes to support vulnerable people.

A sum of £294,752.25 has been allocated to Cheltenham Borough Council to cover the period 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024. This has been calculated on a per head population basis using 2021 mid-year population estimates. The council was notified of this allocation on 11 May 2023.

Previous allocations of household support fund were agreed by Cabinet in [December 2022](#)

This report summarises the allocation, distribution and monitoring of the grant.

## Recommendations:

- **that Cabinet approve the framework for the award of grant funding for the Household Support Fund as set out as set out in para 4.13;**
- **that Cabinet delegate authority to the Head of communities, wellbeing & partnerships in consultation with the Cabinet Member Safety and Communities to determine the agreed amounts to be awarded to individual organisations.**

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## 1. Implications

### 1.1 Financial, Property and Asset implications

There will be no impact on the base budget for CBC as a result of decision. The grant will be invoiced for once the delivery plan has been signed off by GCC. Spend will be monitored and residual balances will be carried forward or returned in accordance with the grant agreement.

**Signed off by:**

Andy Taylor, Principal Commercial Accountant

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### 1.2 Legal implications

The Council should enter into grant agreements with the providers which are based on the approved Small Grant Agreement for grants below £10,000 and the approved Standard Grant Agreement for grants of £10,000 and above.

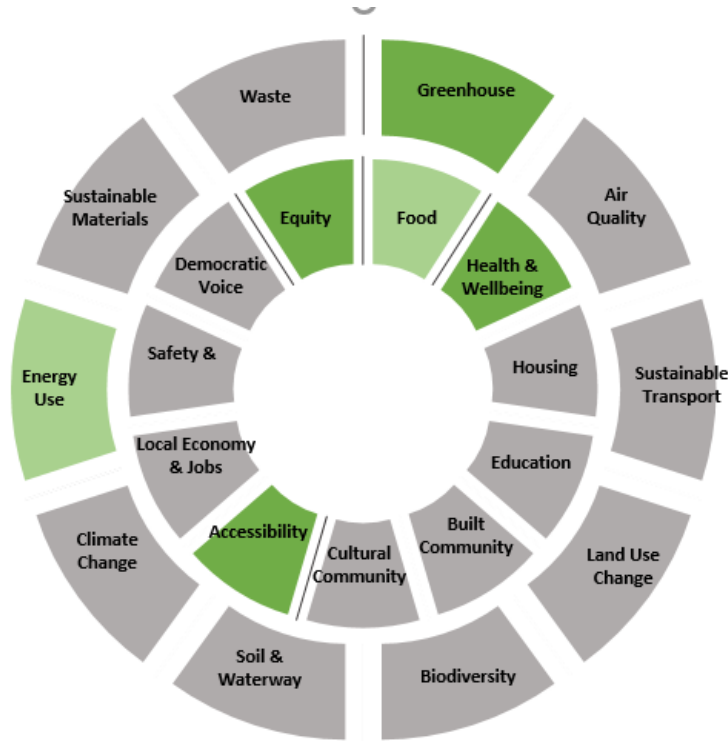
All financial assistance given by the Council to non-individuals has to comply with the provisions of the Subsidy Control Act 2022 (the Act). This replaced state aid when the UK left the EU. In order for financial assistance to be a subsidy, it has to meet 4 criteria; one of which is that an economic advantage is conferred on one or more 'enterprises'.

This criteria will not be met where the benefit of the financial assistance is being passed on by the recipients to residents and the provider themselves are not gaining any benefit. Also, it is unlikely that the providers referred to in this report would be considered to be an 'enterprise' defined as "a person who is engaged in economic activity that entails offering goods or services on a market..."

**Contact: One Legal, [legalservices@onelegal.org.uk](mailto:legalservices@onelegal.org.uk)**

### 1.3 Environmental and climate change implications

The completed dashboard and summary report are attached as **Appendix 2**. The delivery plan for household support fund is generally positive in its contribution to environmental and social outcomes .



### 1.4 Corporate Plan Priorities

This report contributes to the following Corporate Plan 2023 – 2027 Priorities

- Ensuring residents, communities and businesses benefit from Cheltenham’s future growth and prosperity.

The corporate plan includes a specific action in relation to this work:

*Work with partner organisations, such as #FeedCheltenham and Cheltenham Borough Homes, to support our residents and communities with the cost of living crisis*

### 1.5 Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Implications

The project is delivered via an established network of community-based providers who all place a high priority on promoting equality and tackling discrimination. Each of the providers will manage the scheme in line with their own equality and diversity policies.

As a network of providers, they are very much focused on ensuring that those that are in the most need are able to access the additional support funded by the household support fund.

The proposed delivery framework as set out in para 4.13 ensures that there is both a good geographical spread of support across the borough via our network of five community food pantries, plus ensuring that the organisations that are working most closely those that are vulnerable (Citizens Advice, Childrens Centres, CCP and the household essentials project) have the support to make a difference.

### 1.6 Performance management – monitoring and review

The council submits a delivery plan to GCC to secure the funds. This includes an estimate of the numbers of people that will access support. Working with its providers, the Council monitors the numbers of people accessing support via this fund and reports this back to GCC at the end of the scheme.

## 2. Background

- 2.1 The objective of the household support fund is to provide crisis support to vulnerable households in most need of support to help with significantly rising living costs.
- 2.2 Each of the six districts has the flexibility to develop their own schemes that best meets the needs of their local communities whilst complying with the conditions set by the DWP for delivery of the grant to provide support with food, energy and water bills, household items and other essential items.
- 2.3 In the [guidance](#) for county councils and unitary authorities in England, DWP sets out their definitions of eligible spend:
- 2.4 **Energy and water:** The Fund should primarily be used to support energy bills for any form of fuel that is used for the purpose of domestic heating, cooking, or lighting, including oil or portable gas cylinders. It can also be used to support water bills including for drinking, washing, cooking, as well as for sanitary purposes and sewerage.
- 2.5 **Food:** The Fund can be used to provide support with food, whether in-kind or through vouchers or cash.
- 2.6 **Essentials linked to energy and water:** The Fund can be used to provide support with essentials linked to energy and water (for example warm clothing, blankets, the purchase of equipment such as fridges, freezers, ovens, slow cookers), in recognition that a range of costs may arise which directly affect a household's ability to afford or access energy, food and water. In particular, Authorities are encouraged to consider supporting households on low incomes to repair or replace white goods and appliances with more energy efficient ones, or to invest in simple energy efficiency measures which will pay back quickly, such as insulating a hot water tank, fitting draft excluders to a front door, or replacing inefficient lightbulbs or white goods. The intention of this is to provide sustainable support which could result in both immediate and long-lasting savings for the household.
- 2.7 **Wider essentials.** The Fund can be used to support wider essential needs not linked to energy and water should Authorities consider this appropriate in their area. These may include, but are not limited to, support with other bills including broadband or phone bills, clothing, period and hygiene products, essential transport-related costs such as repairing a car, buying a bicycle, or paying for fuel.
- 2.8 **Advice services.** The Fund may be used to provide supplementary advice services to award recipients, including debt and benefit advice, where Authorities consider this appropriate.
- 2.9 Authorities are reminded that the primary intention of The Fund is to provide crisis support for households, and we would expect any advice services to complement this. We would not expect a large portion of funding to be spent on advice services. We would expect to see a connection between the funding provided for advice services and the practical support provided under HSF. We anticipate that a significant proportion of this will be through signposting to existing advice services funded through other routes, such as the Help to Claim scheme which supports those making a claim to Universal Credit.

## 3. How previous funding has been allocated

- 3.1 Previous tranches of the funding were allocated as follows:

**Apr 22 – Sep 22 (6 months)**

<b>Provider</b>	<b>Household Support Fund Activity (Apr 22 – Sep 22)</b>	<b>allocation</b>
#feedcheltenham	Supermarket food vouchers and food pantry tokens to be distributed through the network of community food pantries	47025
	Admin	3150
Cheltenham Children Centres	Household items (eg cleaning / toiletries) for vulnerable families with under 5s, plus clothes and shoes or bedding vouchers.	19350
	Admin	1912.5
Food Bank - energy vouchers	Fuel Bank Foundation vouchers provision via Cheltenham Food Bank, CCP and Springbank	50625
	Admin	1912.5
Chelt Household Essentials Project	Access to household essentials / one-off items to vulnerable families, plus clothes and shoes or bedding vouchers.	9787.5
	Admin	1912.5
CCP	Access to household essentials / one-off items to vulnerable families, plus clothes and shoes or bedding vouchers.	9787.5
	Admin	1912.5
Citizen's advice	clothes and shoes or bedding vouchers.	1350
	Admin	1125
		<b>149850</b>

**Oct 22 – Mar 23 (6 months)**

<b>Provider</b>	<b>Household Support Fund Activity ( )</b>	<b>allocation</b>
#feedcheltenham	Supermarket food vouchers and food pantry tokens to be distributed through the network of community food pantries	37700
	Admin	3770
Cheltenham Children Centres	Household items (eg cleaning / toiletries) for vulnerable families with under 5s, plus clothes, shoes & bedding vouchers.	14170
	Admin	1417
Food Bank - energy vouchers	Fuel Bank Foundation vouchers provision	19500
	Admin	1950
Chelt Household Essentials Project	Access to household essentials / one-off items to vulnerable families, plus clothes, shoes & bedding vouchers.	7410
	Admin	741
CCP	Access to household essentials / one-off items to vulnerable families, plus clothes, shoes & bedding vouchers.	7410
	Admin	741
Citizen's advice	Energy grants	26000
	Admin	2600
		<b>123409</b>

**3.2** For the period October 22 to March 23, the numbers of people supported by the delivery partners was as follows:

<b>Provider</b>	<b>Household Support Fund Activity ( )</b>	<b>monitoring</b>
#feedcheltenham	Supermarket food vouchers and food pantry tokens to be distributed through the network of community food pantries	613 individuals supported via food vouchers
Cheltenham Children Centres	Household items (eg cleaning / toiletries) for vulnerable families with under 5s, plus clothes, shoes & bedding vouchers.	58 households, comprising 83 adults and 131 children
Food Bank - energy vouchers	Fuel Bank Foundation vouchers provision	1,170 individuals supported with fuel vouchers
Chelt Household Essentials Project	Access to household essentials / one-off items to vulnerable families, plus clothes, shoes & bedding vouchers.	46 households supported with household essentials
CCP	Access to household essentials / one-off items to vulnerable families, plus clothes, shoes & bedding vouchers.	67 households supported
Citizen's advice	Energy grants	56 households made up of 87 Adults and 68 Children. 13 people were 65+ and 39 people had a health issue.

## **4. Context for 2023/24 delivery**

**4.1** Working within the government guidance set out above and the decision made by the county council’s cabinet, the council has started the work to assemble its delivery plan as set out in the table below in para 5.11.

**4.2** As in previous years, the government’s focus on food, energy and household essentials means the council can draw on the support of a number of community-based organisations that are working closely with those made vulnerable due to the cost of living crisis. Previous delivery plans have been developed in line with our partnership ethos:

- Provision should to be inclusive – and open to as many people as possible
- Provision should embody our NCLB community agreement – working hand in hand with families, understanding effects of poverty and trauma and being compassionate & strengths-based
- Provision should be partnership-based – building on the network of local community providers and the strength of our relationships eg our community food network
- Provision should be community-based enabling people to build longer-term relationships with local providers which is more sustainable in the long-run

## 5. Proposals for 2023/24 delivery

- 5.1 Taking the context into account, the partners listed below are those best placed to deliver the household support fund programme.
- 5.2 A meeting was held with delivery partners on 18 May and they all confirmed their willingness to be part of the programme.
- 5.3 In terms of support for people with **energy costs**, we have worked closely with Cheltenham Food Bank and Springbank Community Project who both deliver the [Fuel Bank Foundation's](#) vouchers for people on pre-payment meters.
- 5.4 Recognising that the Fuel Bank Foundation support is only for people on pre-payment meters, we have also worked with Citizens Advice who provide emergency grants for people struggling with bills. The grant payments are only given once all other advice options are exhausted.
- 5.5 In 2023/24, we plan to continue to work with Cheltenham Food Bank, Springbank Community Project and Citizens Advice to support people with their energy bills.
- 5.6 The council and its partners will also have access to support from Severn Wye Energy Agency, who are in receipt of £300k via the County Council allocation.
- 5.7 In terms of **food support**, we have worked with #feedcheltenham to provide supermarket food vouchers and food pantry tokens that have been distributed through the network of community food pantries.
- 5.8 In 2023/24, we plan to continue to work with #feedcheltenham, but also provide some direct financial support to the food banks and pantries to enable them to continue to provide food support.
- 5.9 In terms of **household essentials**, in previous years, we have worked with Cheltenham Household Essentials (based at Springbank), CCP and Cheltenham Children's Centres (Aspire Foundation) to provide a range of household items to vulnerable people.
- 5.10 In 2023/24 we plan to continue to work Cheltenham Household Essentials, CCP and Cheltenham Children's Centres. In recognition that the government have included a more specific reference to supporting households to repair or replace white goods and appliances with more energy efficient ones, we plan to work with Vision 21 via their Reclaim project.
- 5.11 We also plan to include some funding for [Unstoppable](#), our period poverty project to enable it to purchase period and hygiene products.

### 5.12 Proposed Delivery Framework April 2023 – March 2024 (12 months)

HSF CATEGORY	Providers	Type of support	Amount 23-24
<b>ENERGY AND WATER</b> to support energy bills related to heating, cooking, or lighting and to support water bills for drinking, washing, cooking, as well as for sanitary purposes and sewerage	Citizen's advice / Food banks and pantries	Energy grants and Fuel Bank Foundation vouchers	56,000
<b>FOOD</b> provide support with food, whether in kind or through vouchers or cash.	#feedcheltenham Food pantries / food banks	Supermarket food vouchers and food pantry tokens, funding to support resilience, direct funding to support food costs	96,000



<b>ESSENTIALS LINKED TO ENERGY AND WATER</b> to provide support with essentials linked to energy and water (for example warm clothing, blankets, the purchase of equipment such as fridges, freezers, ovens, slow cookers), or to repair or replace white goods and appliances with more energy efficient ones, or to invest in simple energy efficiency measures	Cheltenham Children Centres, Chelt Household Essentials Project CCP and Reclaim	Access to household essentials / one-off items to vulnerable families, plus clothes, shoes & bedding vouchers.	70,000
<b>WIDER ESSENTIALS</b> to support wider essential needs include, support with other bills including broadband or phone bills, clothing, period and hygiene products, essential transport-related costs such as repairing a car, buying a bicycle, or paying for fuel.	Unstoppable – period poverty	Supply of period and hygiene products	10,000
<b>ADVICE PROVISION</b> to provide supplementary advice services to award recipients, including debt and benefit advice	Citizens Advice	Funding to increase capacity	35000
<b>Sub-total</b>			267,000
<b>Admin (to be shared by delivery partners:</b>			26,700
<b>TOTAL</b>			293,700

## 6. Reasons for recommendations

- 6.1 Working within the government guidance and within the terms of funding set out by GCC, we have engaged with the partners set out above to assemble the delivery plan and they have agreed to be part of the delivery framework.

## 7. Alternative options considered

- 7.1 As set out above, the council has chosen to work with its community partners as they are the organisations that are working closest with those made vulnerable due to the cost of living crisis. This is in line with our partnership working ethos set out in para 4.2.
- 7.2 As an alternative, the council could have chosen to procure and run its own food and energy voucher scheme. However, this option was dismissed as it would duplicate existing voucher schemes in existence, particularly the county council voucher scheme and more locally the #FeedCheltenham voucher scheme. Plus it would have created a significant draw on staff time to manage the scheme.

## 8. Consultation and feedback

- 8.1 Through our community food network, the council has developed good working relationships with a wide range of community organisations through our collective work to support people during the pandemic and the current cost of living crisis.
- 8.2 Through this network, we have collectively identified the most appropriate organisations to work with on the household support fund scheme. Regular updates are provided to the other organisations via the food network. The delivery plan was then developed in consultation with the providers identified in the tables above.



## **9. Key risks**

- 9.1** There are three risks identified in the risk assessment in appendix 1:
  - 9.2** The potential cost over-run e.g. by inadvertently paying out more to the providers that has been allocated in the delivery plan;
  - 9.3** The potential misuse of the grant;
  - 9.4** The potential for a grant recipient to become insolvent or wound up before the grant is used.
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### **Report author:**

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### **Appendices:**

- i. Risk Assessment
- ii. Climate Impact assessment tool

**Appendix 1: Risk Assessment**

Risk ref	Risk description	Risk owner	Impact score (1-5)	Likelihood score (1-5)	Initial raw risk score (1 - 25)	Risk response	Controls / Mitigating actions	Control / Action owner	Deadline for controls/ actions
	Potential cost over-run by inadvertently paying out more to the providers that has been allocated in the delivery plan	Richard Gibson	3	2	6	Reduce	Only pass money over to third parties up to the maximum that has been pre-allocated and monitoring spend  Ensure due diligence has been undertaken with each provider.	Richard Gibson	31.3.24
	Potential misuse of the grant	Richard Gibson	3	2	6	Reduce	Ensure due diligence has been undertaken with each provider.	Richard Gibson	31.3.24
	If a grant recipient becomes insolvent or winds up before the grant is used	Richard Gibson	3	2	6	Reduce	Endeavour to pay out funds in arrears to minimise financial risk to the council.  Ensure due diligence has been undertaken with each provider.	Richard Gibson	31.3.24