

Cheltenham Borough Council

Cabinet

23 July 2024

Household Support Fund Programme 2024/25

Accountable member:

Cllr Victoria Atherstone, 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

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.

Authorities can use the funding to meet immediate needs and help those who are struggling to afford household essentials including energy and water bills, food, and wider essentials. Authorities can also use funding to support households with housing costs where existing housing support does not meet this need, and to supplement support with signposting and advice

GCC has been allocated £3,692,482 for the period 1 April 2024 to 30 September 2024. The allocation of this funding has been agreed by the County Council's [relevant Cabinet member](#) which includes a sum of £812,500 allocated to the six district councils to enable them to provide their own localised schemes to support vulnerable people.

A sum of £147,376.13 has been allocated to Cheltenham Borough Council to cover the period 1 April 2024 to 30 September 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 31 May

with the request to submit a delivery plan by 14 June.

Previous allocations of household support fund were agreed by Cabinet in [December 2022](#) and [June 2023](#)

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

Recommendations: That Cabinet:

- 1. approves the Household Support Fund Delivery Plan for the award of grant made by Gloucestershire County Council on behalf of the Department of Works and Pensions under the Household Support Fund Programme 2024/25 as set out as set out in para 4.9**
- 2. delegates 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 to deliver the Household Support Fund Programme 2024/25.**

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: Ela Jankowska

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

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 .



Maizy McCann, Climate Emergency Officer, maizy.mccann@cheltenham.gov.uk

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 plan as set out in para 4.9 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, Caring for Communities and People (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.
 - 2.3.1 **Energy and Water.** This may include support with 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.
 - 2.3.2 **Food.** This may include through vouchers, cash or in kind.
 - 2.3.3 **Essentials linked to energy, water and food.** The Fund can be used to provide support with essentials linked to energy, water and food (for example insulation or energy efficient items which reduce bills, the purchase of equipment such as fridges, freezers, ovens, slow cookers or costs associated with obtaining these essentials such as delivery and installation). Government encourage Authorities 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 energy inefficient lightbulbs or white goods. The intention of this is to provide sustainable support which results in immediate and potentially long-lasting savings for the household.
 - 2.3.4 **Wider essentials.** The Fund can be used to support wider essential needs not linked to energy, water or food 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. This list is not exhaustive. It can also include one-off payments to prevent a crisis.
 - 2.3.5 **Advice services.** The Fund may be used to provide supplementary advice services to award recipients, including debt, benefit and/or employment advice, where Authorities consider this appropriate.
 - 2.3.6 **Housing costs.** The Fund can be used to provide support with housing costs to those in need. However, where eligible, ongoing housing support for rent must be provided through the Housing cost element of Universal Credit and Housing Benefit (HB) rather than The Fund.

3. Context for 2024/25 delivery

- 3.1** The cost-of-living crisis remains a real issue for many of our local families. We know that Cheltenham's food banks and food pantries are still supporting over 800 households per week that are experiencing food poverty. 47% of people accessing the Cheltenham Food Bank's services are doing so due to the rising cost of essentials and 1068 households were referred to the Food Bank for the first time in 2023/2024.
- 3.2** National Citizens Advice data suggests 5 million people, including 1.5 million children, are in a household with a negative budget. The problem is deepening with the average monthly deficit for a negative budget household going from -£270 in 2019/20 to -£365 in 2023/24
- 3.3** Locally, Citizens Advice are dealing with up to 400 calls per week, with highest areas of concern relating to debt, welfare benefits and housing
- 3.4** Last year Cheltenham Housing Aid Centre provided advice to 140 clients which represented an increase of 22% on the previous year. 38% of their clients are in receipt of disability benefits which represents an increase of 8.5% on the previous year.
- 3.5** 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.
- 3.6** The council already works closely with these partners via the Facing Hardship multi-agency group. The group sits as a sub-group under The Communities Partnership and aims to reduce the impacts of poverty and stigma through a collective approach to supporting communities. Members includes; Citizen Advice Bureau, Caring for Communities and People (CCP), Maggie's, Cheltenham Borough Homes, FeedCheltenham (YMCA), Cheltenham Housing Aid Centre, Jobcentre Plus (DWP), VCS, Primary School rep, Secondary School Rep, Gloucestershire College, Gloucestershire Hospitals and CBC. The group is chaired by a representative from Citizens Advice.
- 3.7** Through the Facing Hardship group, on 6 June 2024, a cost of living seminar was held that 33 partners attended representing 22 organisations. The opportunity of the household support fund was shared with all attendees with an invite to attend subsequent meetings if they wished to be part of the delivery plan. In this way, the council has been open about the opportunity with a wide range of potential delivery partners.
- 3.8** Two meetings were then held with potential delivery partners on 12 June and 14 June and all six delivery partners confirmed their willingness to be part of the programme.
- 3.9** Additional context for the development of the delivery plan is provided by our partnership ethos:
 - Provision should be inclusive – and open to as many people as possible
 - Provision should embody our No Child Left Behind 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

3.10 Working within the context set out above and the government guidance, the council has started the work to assemble its delivery plan as set out in the table below in para 4.9

4. Proposals for 2024/25 delivery

- 4.1** In 2023/24, we supported people with energy costs, through working closely with Cheltenham Food Bank and Springbank Community Project who both delivered the [Fuel Bank Foundation's](#) vouchers for people on pre-payment meters.
- 4.2** Cheltenham Food Bank now report that they have secured funding for the Fuel Bank scheme for both their provision and Springbank's so do not require any additional financial support for energy costs from HSF.
- 4.3** Instead for **energy support**, HSF will be used to support Citizens Advice to provide emergency grants for people struggling with bills. The grant payments are only given once all other advice options are exhausted. Via a contribution of £16,250, an estimated 65 people will be supported.
- 4.4** The council and its partners will also have access to support from Severn Wye Energy Agency, who are in receipt of £150k via the County Council's allocation of household support fund.
- 4.5** In terms of **food support**, we will work with #Feedcheltenham to provide supermarket food vouchers and food pantry tokens that will be distributed through the network of community food pantries – value of £16,120. We will also provide some direct financial support to the food pantries to enable them to continue to provide food support – value of £23,000, plus an allocation of £6120 to enable #feedcheltenham to make bulk purchases on behalf of the network. The contribution of £45,240 will enable 1,131 food support awards to be made.
- 4.6** In terms of **household essentials**, we will work with Cheltenham Household Essentials (based at Springbank), Caring for Communities and People (CCP) and Cheltenham Children's Centres (Aspire Foundation) to provide a range of household items to vulnerable people. 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 will also explore working with Vision 21 via their Reclaim project. Via a total contribution of £36,660, an estimated 183 people will be supported.
- 4.7** In terms of **wider essentials**, we will also include some funding for [Unstoppable](#), our period poverty project to enable it to purchase period and hygiene products, including continence products. Via a contribution of £2,470, an estimated 247 people will be supported.
- 4.8** In terms of **advice provision**, we will work with Citizens Advice and Cheltenham Housing Aid Centre. The two providers will provide additional advice services and support to food banks and pantries to ensure that people most affected by the cost of living crisis are able to access good quality advice. Via a contribution of £34,450, an estimated 69 people will be supported.

4.9 Proposed Delivery Plan 1 April 2024 – 30 September 2024 (6 months)

HSF CATEGORY	Providers	Type of support	Amount
ENERGY AND WATER 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	Energy grants and Fuel Bank Foundation vouchers	16250
FOOD 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	45240
ESSENTIALS LINKED TO ENERGY AND WATER 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.	36660
WIDER ESSENTIALS 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	2470
ADVICE PROVISION to provide supplementary advice services to award recipients, including debt and benefit advice	Citizens Advice	Funding to increase capacity	34450
Sub-total			135070
Admin (to be shared by delivery partners:			12500
TOTAL			147570

5. Reasons for recommendations

5.1 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 plan.

5.2 Five out of the six delivery partners have delivered the household support fund programme for the previous two years. The new partner, Cheltenham Housing Aid Centre, is a well-established housing charity that has been supporting local residents

since 1988.

5.3 Grant agreements will be entered into with the six delivery partners that will set out the terms by which the household support fund grant is offered.

6. Alternative options considered

6.1 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 by the cost of living crisis. This is in line with our partnership working ethos set out in para 4.2.

6.2 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.

7. Consultation and feedback

7.1 Through our Facing Hardship group, 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.

7.2 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.

8. Key risks

8.1 There are three risks identified in the risk assessment in appendix 1:

8.2 The potential cost over-run e.g. by inadvertently paying out more to the providers that has been allocated in the delivery plan;

8.3 The potential misuse of the grant;

8.4 The potential for a grant recipient to become insolvent or wound up before the grant is used.

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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	30.9.24
	Potential misuse of the grant	Richard Gibson	3	2	6	Reduce	Ensure due diligence has been undertaken with each provider.	Richard Gibson	30.9.24
	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	30.9.24