

Report to Cabinet

3 November 2021

Subject:	Household Support Fund
Cabinet Member:	Councillor Maria Crompton – Cabinet member for Finance and Resources
Director:	Simone Hines – Director of Finance
Key Decision:	Yes Significant in terms of its effect on communities living or working in an area comprising two or more wards of the Borough.
Contact Officer:	Ian Dunn – Service Manager Revenues and Benefits ian_dunn@sandwell.gov.uk

1 Recommendations

That approval be given to:

- 1.1 Use the Household Support Fund to provide financial support to those Sandwell residents who are most in need this winter.
- 1.2 To provide support to families who receive free school meals with food vouchers during the school holidays in October, December 2021, February and April 2022 at a cost of £1.67 million, providing additional support for around 18,700 households.
- 1.3 To provide £123,000 to food banks to purchase food and other essential items and to include the setting up of 3 new food pantries.
- 1.4 The criteria to be considered for a Household Support Fund payment award as detailed in 2.7 of this report and approve the Household Support Fund Policy 2021-22 attached at Appendix A.



2 Reasons for Recommendations

- 2.1 The Government has made available £500m to councils to support those most in need this winter during the final stages of economic recovery. This has been made available to councils earlier in October
- 2.2 Sandwell have been allocated funding of £3,471,442, for the period 6th October 2021 to 31st March 2022.
- 2.3 Government guidance states it will be up to each council as to how it administers the funding, although at the time of writing the report the guidance is only draft and we are awaiting the final version from government.
- 2.4 At least 50% of the total funding must be spent on families with children, and for Sandwell this is £1.7m.
- 2.5 In terms of type of support, the expectation is that the HSF should primarily be used to support the most vulnerable households in need with:
- Providing food
 - Paying utility bills (energy and water)
 - Other wider reaching household costs deemed essential, i.e. paying for broadband, mobile phone costs, boiler repairs etc.
 - Supporting housing costs where the existing housing support schemes do not meet this exceptional need
- 2.6 Funding will be provided to support families who receive free school meals with food vouchers during the school holidays in October, December 2021, February and April 2022. This will cost £1.67m and will provide additional support for around 18,700 households.
- 2.7 As this is a cash limited fund the eligibility criteria for a Household Support Fund payment would include an individual who is:
- working age
 - liable for Council Tax and or Rent in Sandwell
 - receiving Universal Credit, Working Tax Credit, income-based Employment & Support Allowance, income-based Jobseeker's Allowance, Income Support, Housing Benefit, Council Tax reduction



- suffering financial hardship
 - not have savings over £3k
- 2.8 The Household Support Fund will be administered by Revenues and Benefits. We know from our Council Tax Reduction records that there are around 21,000 households which receive financial help towards their Council Tax as they are on low incomes. We will write to these households to invite them to make an application.
- 2.9 We will also use social media, welfare rights, stakeholders etc. to promote the Household Support Fund so that they can encourage the people most in need that they meet to apply for financial support.
- 2.10 The application form will be available on line and for anyone who needs support to complete a form this will be available by Revenues and Benefits staff and Welfare Rights.
- 2.11 There will be an initial application window from the 5th November to the 3rd December 2021 and the scheme will allow an individual to obtain 1 award in each window. This 1 award could be a combination of the support available as detailed in 2.5.
- 2.12 Two further application windows will be available if funding allows and a household can receive a maximum of 3 awards during the period to 31st March 2022.

3 How does this deliver objectives of the Corporate Plan?

	<p><i>A Strong and Inclusive Economy</i></p> <p>The use of the Household Support fund outlined in this report will allow us to continue to support those most in need this winter.</p>
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4 Context and Key Issues

- 4.1 Given the timeframe involved there has been little stakeholder engagement on the use of the Household Support fund. However, the approach outlined in this report ensures support is targeted to our lowest income households
- 4.2 The fund will be administered by the Revenues and Benefits Service and any costs incurred can be claimed from the £3.4m. The service will reallocate resources to focus on application forms so that administrative costs are minimised.
- 4.3 All applications will be processed in accordance with GDPR regulations.
- 4.4 Due to the timing of the government announcement, this decision was not included in the Forward Plan and also is exempt from call-in on the grounds of urgency. The Chair of the Budget and Corporate Management Scrutiny Board has given consent to this report being included on the agenda.

5 Alternative Options

- 5.1 The Government guidance does state the Household Support Fund may be awarded to households not currently in receipt of DWP welfare benefits.
- 5.2 This approach could be considered in future application windows after the initial window from the 5th November to the 3rd December 2021

6 Implications

Resources:	The grants will be paid by Revenues and Benefits staff. There is no impact on any council managed property or land.
Legal and Governance:	Government guidance outlines appropriate use of this funding. This has been detailed in the report.
Risk:	Risk assessments will be undertaken and updated throughout the scheme with an emphasis on



	managing the risk of fraud. Pre and post payment checks will also be carried out.
Equality:	An equality impact assessment is not required for the proposals in this report.
Health and Wellbeing:	The assistance we provide by way of payments will help our citizens to better manage financially and will in turn aid their personal well-being.
Social Value	See above under 'Health and Wellbeing'.

7. Appendices

Household Support Fund Policy 2021/2022

8. Background Papers

None

