

RIBBLE VALLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO POLICY AND FINANCE COMMITTEE

meeting date: TUESDAY, 9 APRIL 2024
title: HOUSEHOLD SUPPORT FUND ROUND 5
submitted by: DIRECTOR OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND PLANNING
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1 PURPOSE

1.1 To update Committee on the Household Support Fund Round 5 (HSF5) and to seek approval for potential spend.

2 BACKGROUND

2.1 On 6th October 2021 the Government announced that a new Household Support Fund (HSF1) grant would be made available to County Councils and Unitary Authorities in England to support those most in need. This fund has subsequently been extended three times with HSF4 ending in March 2024.

2.2 On 6 March 2024, in the Spring Budget, the Chancellor announced that the Household Support Fund (HSF) would be extended for a further six months, from 1 April 2024 to 30 September 2024, with a further £421m of funding. As has been done for previous schemes, the fund will be made available to County Councils and Unitary Authorities in England to support those most in need. Lancashire County Council has been awarded £9,678,235.22; this matches previous 6-month period allocations.

2.3 At this stage LCC have confirmed that there are some slight additions to the terms and conditions of this grant which they are reviewing. They aim to provide details for district allocations after the Easter Holiday.

3 HOUSEHOLD SUPPORT FUND ROUND 4

3.1 At this Committee on the 20th June 2023 the following was agreed for HSF4:

1.1.A supermarket voucher application scheme initially from 3rd July until 1st September 2023 (with additional application windows funding permitting) with the following criteria/offer:

- £200 for single households
- £300 for households with two or more adults residing.
- £500 for households with children
- A combined household income threshold of up to £50,000.
- Agreement for the applicants to have a discussion with our Debt/Cost of Living Advisor in respect of financial matters.

1.2.Targeted assistance to the following groups:

- Unpaid carers who are disregarded for Council Tax purposes.
- Care leavers
- Households who have been in receipt of a disability facility grant since 6 October 2021

1.3.Financial and debt advice provided in house by the appointed Debt/Cost of Living Advisor whilst the funding is available.

- 1.4. Discuss with LCC the possibility of removing criteria that anyone in receipt of the cost-of-living payment or winter fuel payment will not be eligible.
- 3.2 At Policy and Finance Committee on 12th September 2023 a second round of applications was approved with the same criteria as round one, to run from 2nd October until 1st December 2023. It was also agreed that successful round one applicants would not be eligible to apply again in round two.
- 3.3 Round two of the applications proved very popular and at this Committee in January 2024 Members were advised that the second round of applications was closed on 17th November 2023 given the number of applications being received and the limited funding remaining. All the Council's HSF4 funding was utilised by Christmas 2023.
- 3.4 Committee were advised that when the application process was closed on 17th November 331 applications had been received although they not been assessed as to whether the households were eligible. Following the assessment 269 of the applications were eligible. Supermarket vouchers, upto the value of funding the Council had remaining, were sent to eligible applicants in date order of receipt and the remaining eligible applicants were contacted either by e-mail or post to confirm that unfortunately the funding had run out although they would be prioritised for assistance in the event of more funding becoming available.
- 3.5 A few more applicants have received supermarket vouchers subsequently. This is due to vouchers not being redeemed and the funding returned into our voucher account on their expiry. At the time of writing this report 9 vouchers have not been redeemed by the recipients equating to £1550. This money will be returned to LCC if the vouchers are not redeemed before their expiry date (end of April 2024) because, as per previous rounds of this scheme, authorities are unable to carry forward any underspends from previous schemes.
- 3.6 There are currently 214 eligible applicants from HSF4 who have not received vouchers. This would equate to £57,400. At this stage Committee approval is sought to prioritise the eligible applicants who did not receive a voucher as part of the HSF4 round of funding.
- 3.7 If Members are minded to prioritise these households in the first instance, subject to the receipt of sufficient funding from LCC, it is suggested that each of the 214 households are invited to reapply for the fund, on the basis of the scheme criteria established under HSF4. This would establish whether these households are still eligible. Thereafter a report will be brought to this Committee setting out a proposed scheme for HSF5 which will detail the amount of funding and any specified criteria from LCC.

4 HOUSEHOLD SUPPORT FUND ROUND 5

- 4.1 The Department of Work and Pensions, who distribute this funding, have confirmed that there are several changes from previous versions of this fund. The following key differences are:
- Funding for evaluation activities, including data collection (for example, quantitative surveying and/or qualitative interviewing with recipients of the fund) and analysis and report writing, will now be considered eligible spend as an administrative cost.
 - It is mandatory that in any publicity material for the scheme, including via online channels and media releases, Authorities make clear that this funding is being provided by the UK Government. This requirement extends to other public bodies (for example, District Councils) delivering the scheme on behalf of the Authority.
 - Delivery plans must be signed off by your Section 151 Officer and include the information of the Section 151 Officer and responsible Cabinet Member before submission to DWP.

4.2 The fund can be used to provide support with food, energy and water, essentials linked to energy and water, 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.

4.3 The main key change which would be applicable to RVBC is that Authorities will be able to use a limited proportion of their allocations to conduct (and either fully or partially fund) local evaluation of their scheme. This will be considered as an administration cost although at this stage it is not clear whether LCC will require districts to undertake this assessment.

5 RVBC Allocation

5.1 The Household Support Fund is provided to Lancashire County Council. LCC have distributed a proportion of their funding to district councils in previous rounds. At the time of writing this report confirmation as to whether LCC will distribute part of their funding to districts has still to be received.

5.2 Committee will recall that as part of previous funding rounds LCC have included specific requirements within the grant agreements with district councils. As part of HSF4 the following requirements were included within the funding agreement:

5.2.1 Targeted assistance to care leavers and unpaid carers. RVBC also approached families in receipt of a disability facility grant.

5.2.2 10% of our allocation for debt/ financial advice

5.3 LCC may attach new conditions to any distribution of funding to districts under HSF5 however this is yet to be confirmed.

5.4 Once confirmation of funding for RVBC has been received from LCC, along with any grant requirements, a report will be brought back to this Committee

6 ADMINISTRATION

6.1 Committee needs to be aware that administering the numerous grants which have been announced since the pandemic started is very time and resource intensive.

6.2 The grant enables the inclusion of reasonable costs incurred administering the scheme. These include for example:

6.2.1 staff costs

6.2.2 advertising publicity to raise awareness of the scheme

6.2.3 web page design

6.2.4 printing application forms

6.2.5 small IT changes, for example, to facilitate MI production

6.3 A 5% administration fee was attached to the initial HSF1. A 7.5% administration fee was attached to HSF2 and HSF3 acknowledging the administrative burdens associated with this fund. A 10% administration fee was attached to HSF4 noting the significant administrative burdens of administering this fund through previous rounds.

7 RISK ASSESSMENT

7.1 The approval of this report may have the following implications:

- Resources – LCC are the recipients of this funding however RVBC will be required to enter into a grant agreement for any of their funding which is distributed to RVBC. Adherence with this grant agreement will be required along with the requirement to return any unspent money as of 30th September 2024.

Internal controls including budget monitoring will help ensure that any audit requirements are met and that spend is kept within the funding made available.

- Technical, Environmental and Legal – a suitable grant agreement will be required to be entered into with LCC. Officers will comply with the reporting conditions contained within.
- Political - N/A
- Reputation – N/A
- Equality and Diversity – The fund is intended to assist any of our residents who have not received Government assistance to date and are struggling. Any direct contact as set out within the proposed scheme will be based upon information, we have access to however all residents who meet the criteria will be able to apply for the fund. Any resident who struggles to complete a form online will be provided with assistance from our staff.

8 RECOMMENDED THAT COMMITTEE

- 8.1 Confirm whether the eligible applicants as part of HSF4, who did not receive a supermarket voucher due to insufficient funding, should be prioritised in the event that RVBC receive sufficient funding from LCC. Each of the households will be invited to apply for funding again to ensure that they are still eligible (in accordance with the scheme delivered as part of HSF4).

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