

NORTH LINCOLNSHIRE COUNCIL

CHILDREN AND FAMILIES FINANCE AND GOVERNANCE CABINET MEMBERS

HOUSEHOLD SUPPORT FUND

1. OBJECT AND KEY POINTS IN THIS REPORT

- 1.1 This report sets out the outcomes arising from the conclusion of the Household Support Fund Scheme (Winter 2021/22) in North Lincolnshire and proposes an enhanced delivery model in response to the government's recently announced extension of the scheme to 30 September 2022.

2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 2.1 The council recognises the different ways that COVID-19 and recent cost of living rises have impacted upon individuals, families and households. Working alongside partners and the community the council has ensured that a strong offer of support has been provided to the most vulnerable people in North Lincolnshire, including those in employment and on low incomes.
- 2.2 This support has included help with food and other essential household bills, funded through a number of government schemes including the Defra Emergency Support Grant, COVID-19 Winter Grant and subsequent Local Support Grant. This has included the direct provision of food vouchers to families with the lowest incomes and children entitled to Free School Meals (FSM), alongside a welfare assistance scheme open to any household experiencing acute financial hardship.
- 2.3 On 6 October 2021 the government announced the launch of a £421 million Household Support Fund (HSF) to support those most in need over the winter during the economic recovery, covering the period 6 October to 31 March 2022. Councils were given discretion to use the funding flexibly, with the expectation that it is primarily used to support households in the most immediate need with food, energy, water and other essential household bills. In exceptional cases of genuine emergency it could additionally be used to support housing costs where existing housing support schemes do not meet this exceptional need.

- 2.4 The scope of the fund was wider than previous schemes and included both families with children as well as individuals of all ages including people who are in work and experiencing hardship.
- 2.5 The delivery model for the grant was approved by cabinet members and launched in North Lincolnshire on 29 November 2021. The model comprised three core elements as set out below:

a) Welfare Assistance

A third sector organisation was commissioned to deliver a welfare assistance scheme, open to all North Lincolnshire households who applied directly for support and who met the eligibility criteria. Effective management of the scheme enabled it to remain open for its full intended duration i.e to 31 March 2022:

- 7,000 grants were provided including to 2,300 pensioners in receipt of maximum council tax support
- Average grant award value c.£115
- 59% of awards made to families with children; 41% to individuals
- Profile of awards:
 - Food - 59%
 - Energy & Water - 28%
 - White Goods - 3%
 - Clothing - 7%
 - Other - 3%

Grants were issued following a proportionate assessment process and offered alongside the provision of information and signposting, aimed at enabling residents to self-help and access additional support or community activity / service as required.

An interim extension to the scheme was put in place for the period 1 April – 1 May 2022 in order to maintain continuity of support in North Lincolnshire pending approval of the delivery plan for a Spring/Summer HSF scheme.

b) Food Voucher Scheme

Half of the HSF grant was allocated for the direct provision of food vouchers to families with children. Data has been used to identify eligible families, and as with previous iterations of the scheme the local approach has scoped in families with children outside of the free school meals cohort and care leavers with immediate support needs.

The approach however differed from previous grant schemes. Vouchers were allocated in 2 batches, the first being a winter grant of £40 per child (issued in December) to 7,449 families and the second being a spring grant of £40 per child (issued in February 2022) to 8,434 families.

In order to maximise opportunities for enabling independence, alongside the vouchers families were given information about local and online sources of help and support such as debt management and welfare rights, employment advice, and healthy eating/lifestyles. In addition, information was provided about local activities including those funded through the Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) programme over Christmas and Easter.

c) Housing related support costs

A small portion of the grant was allocated for the provision of specific housing related support in compliance with the terms of the government guidance.

- 2.6 The Chancellor recently announced that a further £421m would be made available to councils in England to support those most in need to help with significantly rising living costs. This funding covers the period 1 April 2022 to 30 September 2022. As with previous schemes councils have discretion on exactly how this funding is used within the scope set out in the grant conditions and guidance. Essentially the expectation is that it should primarily be used to support households in the most need particularly those including children and pensioners who would otherwise struggle with energy bills, food and water bills.
- 2.7 The government has recognised that energy bills may be of particular concern to low-income households during the period of the scheme and councils are encouraged to consider how they can support households with the cost of energy. It can also be used to support households with essential costs related to those items and with wider essential costs. In exceptional cases of genuine emergency it can additionally be used to support housing costs where existing housing support schemes do not meet this exceptional need, particularly those who cannot increase their income through work, to prevent escalation of problems.
- 2.8 Councils have the ability to deliver the scheme through a variety of routes including providing vouchers to households, making direct provision of food or goods, or issuing grants to third parties.
- 2.9 A key change in the grant conditions is that at least one third of the total funding must be ring-fenced to support households with children, at least one third to support pensioners with up to one third to other households genuinely in need of support.
- 2.10 Alongside the Household Support Fund the government has recently introduced a Council Tax Energy Rebate. This comprises a core scheme for Bands A – D and a discretionary scheme for supporting wider needs associated with the rising cost of energy. It is proposed to align the discretionary scheme with the Household Support Fund to provide a single point of access for residents.

2.11 In response the following enhanced delivery model for North Lincolnshire is proposed:

1. Welfare Assistance

- Initial £500k allocation
- Targeted at vulnerable households via front line professionals and key partners
- Primary method for meeting demand led need – open to all vulnerable households
- Delivered via expert external third sector partner
- Subject to a robust application and assessment process to verify “in crisis” need
- Enhanced focus on targeted provision and enabling self-help such as pathways into education and employment
- Digital assistance provided by the council’s contact centre and community hubs

2. Food Voucher

- Initial £500k allocation
- £50 per child Summer food voucher to 8,400 families in receipt of free school meals
- £80k allocation for supporting care leavers, vulnerable families identified by schools, individuals, and pensioners

3. Energy Payment

- Initial £600k allocation
- Includes discretionary energy rebate scheme for financially vulnerable individuals living in households in bands E – H
- Targeted at people on pre-paid meters, single people claiming Universal Credit and c. 5,000 financially vulnerable pensioner households

4. Other Essential Household Items

- Initial £50k allocation
- Applications considered under the Welfare Assistance scheme and subject to a panel review over £100
- Focus on energy efficient appliances where appropriate
- Open to all vulnerable households

2.12 A summary of the delivery model is attached at Appendix 1.

3. OPTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

3.1 Option 1: Note the outcomes arising from the Winter HSF scheme and approve the proposed local delivery framework for the Spring/Summer HSF Scheme.

3.2 Option 2: Note the outcomes arising from the Winter HSF scheme and reject or modify the proposed local delivery framework for the Spring/Summer HSF Scheme.

4. ANALYSIS OF OPTIONS

4.1 Option 1 is informed by the learning and outcomes from the Winter scheme and advice from relevant stakeholders and professionals. Its approval will enable timely delivery of the scheme from May 2022.

5. FINANCIAL AND OTHER RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (e.g. LEGAL, HR, PROPERTY, IT, COMMUNICATIONS etc.)

5.1 The funding allocation for a Winter HSF scheme in North Lincolnshire was £1,323,892.77. The grant was fully spent on the delivery of financial support to residents in North Lincolnshire.

5.2 A government grant of £1.324m has been allocated for the delivery of an extended HSF scheme in North Lincolnshire for the period 1 April 2022 to 30 September 2022. An additional government grant of £0.3m has been allocated to support the provision of a discretionary energy rebate allied to the core council tax energy rebate.

6. OTHER RELEVANT IMPLICATIONS (e.g. CRIME AND DISORDER, EQUALITIES, COUNCIL PLAN, ENVIRONMENTAL, RISK etc.)

6.1 The design of the scheme aligns local delivery with the principles and priorities set out in the Council Plan. They are aimed at the most vulnerable and enable and promote equality of opportunity and self-responsibility. The model also helps to prepare families for the future when supplementary support from government schemes will no longer be available.

7. OUTCOMES OF INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT (IF APPLICABLE)

7.1 No adverse impacts have been identified.

8. OUTCOMES OF CONSULTATION AND CONFLICTS OF INTERESTS DECLARED

8.1 None

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

9.1 Cabinet members are invited to note the outcomes arising from the conclusion of the Household Support Fund Scheme in North Lincolnshire; and

9.2 To approve the proposed enhanced Spring/Summer HSF delivery model for the extended period to 30 September 2022.

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Background Papers used in the preparation of this report
DWP Grant Letter and supporting National Guidance
Local Delivery Framework

	Welfare Assistance	Food Voucher	Energy Payment	Other Essential Household Items
Provisional Budget	£500k	£500k	£600k*	£50k
Targeted Offer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Targeted communication/awareness of welfare assistance offer via: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Front line professionals ▪ VCO sector ▪ NHS ▪ Care Sector ▪ Community meals ▪ External partner 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Summer food voucher issue: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Families receiving free school meals c. 7,500 ▪ Care leavers ▪ Other financially vulnerable families identified by schools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Households band E- H which meet energy rebate discretionary criteria e.g.in receipt of CTS - Households on pre-payment meters - Other households which meet the energy rebate discretionary criteria - Pensioner households inc. full/partial CTS; pension credit recipients; single resident in receipt of UC 	N/a
Demand Responsive Offer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Primary delivery option for meeting demand responsive need 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Referral and response via welfare assistance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Referral and response via welfare assistance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Referral and response via welfare assistance
Enablers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provision via external partner - Revamped eForm application - Digital assistance via council contact centre - Signposting to wider support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Supermarket vouchers - Post office 'pay-out' service - Intelligence via DWP and local data sets inform targeted offer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Post office 'pay-out' service - Intelligence via DWP and local data sets inform targeted offer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Supermarket vouchers - Post office 'pay-out' service - Discretionary Housing Payments
Comments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Open to all vulnerable households - Steering group leads on partner engagement and targeting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Primary focus is households with children, however care leavers and other vulnerable households in scope - Steering group leads on partner engagement and targeting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Primary focus is pensioner households and other vulnerable households in scope for discretionary energy payments - Steering group leads on partner engagement and targeting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Panel review of applications for white goods over £100 - Open to all vulnerable households - Increased focus on energy saving appliances
*Includes discretionary energy rebate funding				