

STROUD DISTRICT COUNCIL
STRATEGY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

TUESDAY, 11 JULY 2023

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| Report Title | Household Support Funding Delivery Plan (April 2023-March 2024) |
| Purpose of Report | This report sets out the proposed Household Support Fund (HSF) delivery plan for 2023/24 and delegate authority for the delivery of the plan to the Strategic Director for Communities. |
| Decision(s) | The Committee RESOLVES to: a) Approve the Household Support Funding Delivery Plan for 2023/24; and b) Delegates authority for delivery of the plan to the Strategic Director for Communities. |
| Consultation and Feedback | <p>Districts: HSF leads from the six Gloucestershire districts have been sharing good practice on delivery since the first HSF allocation. After reviewing different approaches, the consensus from the districts is that working through appropriate partners is the most effective way to deliver this funding.</p> <p>Residents: Those who receive support via partners value the range of support and other advice they can access via our partners, as well as supermarket vouchers. They also value being able to access support in their local area where possible.</p> <p>Partners: SDC partners appreciate the concrete help they are able to provide with a voucher, as well as being linked into other expert advice available by working in partnership with SDC.</p> <p>Strategic Leadership Team: The delivery plan has been discussed at SLT.</p> <p>Members: The Chairs and Vice-Chairs of Housing Committee and Community Services & Licensing Committees have oversight of the HSF delivery through the monthly Cost of Living Working Group.</p> |
| Report Author | Emma Keating Clark, Community Health & Wellbeing Manager Email: emma.keatingclark@stroud.gov.uk |
| Options | There is minimal administrative allowance with this funding so in-house delivery is not an option and would not enable access to target communities. This delivery plan is based on testing and learning from the delivery of three previous HSF allocations. |

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| Background Papers | None | | | |
| Appendices | Appendix A – SDC Household Support Fund Delivery Plan 2023/34 Appendix B – Equality Impact Assessment HSF | | | |
| Implications (further details at the end of the report) | Financial | Legal | Equality | Environmental |
| | Yes | Yes | Yes | No |

1. INTRODUCTION / BACKGROUND

1.1 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 Council'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 £300,000 has been allocated to Stroud District 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.

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

1.2 Household Support Fund Objectives

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.

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.

In the guidance for county councils and unitary authorities in England, DWP sets out their definitions of eligible spend. The Stroud District Council HSF Delivery Plan has been developed in accordance with the guidance below:

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.

Food: The Fund can be used to provide support with food, whether in-kind or through vouchers or cash.

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.

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.

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.

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.

2. MAIN POINTS

2.1 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. The delivery plan has been developed in line with good community wellbeing practice as follows:

- Provision should be inclusive – and open to as many people as possible.
- Provision should be community-based enabling people to build longer-term relationships with local providers which is more sustainable in the long-run than central delivery or using out of area providers.
- Provision should be partnership-based – building on the network of local community providers and strengthening our working relationships eg our Community Hubs network, our Know Your Patch Network statutory and voluntary members, our School partners and our Integrated Care System partners.
- Provision should be compassionate & strengths-based - working hand in hand with residents, understanding the effects of poverty and trauma and working with people to build on strengths.

2.2 The grant recipients have been chosen because it would have been impossible for SDC to directly deliver all of the support required for HSF. The fund does not provide enough administration costs to cover the staff needed to find and support all those affected by the Cost of Living Crisis across the whole district. Likewise, there is no single provider who covers all the urban and rural areas of Stroud District with the multiple skills and contacts needed to reach all target groups. A partnership delivery model has been the most effective way to district the funding to where it is needed. This approach has been adopted by most of the districts in Gloucestershire and good practice has been shared between the six districts through the Strengthening Local Communities Group.

- 2.3** The current HSF model is based on working through partners in the community. These partners are working with us because they either deliver specialist services like advice or household support or they work in a specific geography or with a specific group of people, like families. Our partners are all keen to keep working with us on HSF.

It is worth noting here that because the HSF allocation provides very little funding for administration of the scheme, some partners have chosen not to support HSF delivery because it will not cover their actual costs. The partners who have agreed to support the HSF delivery are either subsidising the delivery costs themselves or doing so on a voluntary basis. SDC will continue to promote the scheme to diverse partners in order to reach vulnerable groups.

Below is a list of partners who have been agreed to support in HSF delivery against each support priority. Further details can be found in the Full Delivery Plan attached in Appendix A.

Support for Food

The majority of this support is provided through discretionary supermarket vouchers plus a small amount of dry or fresh food from Food Pantries or cooked food at Hub cafes. SDC hold some vouchers for SDC services who work with residents on the front line. Most of the vouchers are distributed to the public via partners who either work in areas of high deprivation or isolation from services or partners who support target groups.

| Recipient | Target Group |
|--|---|
| Citizens Advice | Anyone in financial crisis. |
| Foodbank | Anyone in financial crisis. Vouchers may be issued where referrals cannot use the usual food allocation, particularly useful for those with religious or dietary requirements. |
| Community Hubs – currently 10 across the district distributing vouchers. | Hubs are based in neighbourhoods to support those struggling to access services. They run weekly cafes, Foodbank or Food Pantry sessions and host advice sessions alongside these. During these session, discretionary vouchers will be issued. |
| Primary, Secondary and College settings | Families and Young People. Some educational settings have taken up the offer of vouchers. They are typically held with the pastoral staff and used at their discretion if a family or young person is struggling. |
| Adult Social Care | ASC hold a small number of vouchers to be issued by their District Nurses when visiting vulnerable patients who have no food. |
| Parish Town Councils | Some local councils have set up food pantries on their own premises and issue vouchers to residents. |

Support for Energy and Water

| Recipient | Target Group |
|-----------|--------------|
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| Fuel Bank Foundation | The Fuel Bank is a sister charity to the Foodbank so anyone referred to Stroud District Foodbank can access Fuel Bank support. They provide fast, on the day fuel payments. NOTE: This is a district allocation to a fast, local organisation in addition to the county allocation of £300k to Severn Wye Energy Agency. SWEA has a slower process and ran out of funding for a short time last year. |
| Citizens Advice | Anyone in financial crisis. |

Support for Wider Essentials

| Recipient | Target Group |
|------------------------|---|
| Citizens Advice | Discretionary budget for wider essentials. The CA advisors are trained to deal with complex issues and sometimes a small discretionary grant is the best way to solve a crisis whilst providing ongoing support. |
| Furniture Bank | Household essentials. Support for households referred in need of furniture or white goods. Furniture Bank take referrals from all over the District and are a delivery partner for SDC Housing team. |
| Home Start | Wider essentials for vulnerable families from pregnancy to age 5. Home Start provide groups in Hubs and long term, one to one support for young families. They are regular users of Food Hubs so a discretionary HSF allocation for their groups and mentors will reach vulnerable families not yet in the school system. |
| Community Hubs network | Wider essentials for vulnerable residents. In addition to running outreach Foodbanks and Pantries, the Hubs provide access to advice workers and social support. |

Support for Money Advice

In addition to established Food, Fuel and Wider Essentials delivery partners, this year for the first time, HSF is allowed to support additional money advice support. SDC has good partners already delivering this in some parts of the district. This HSF allocation will enable them to extend their delivery where demand is high and to work in a more coherent, joined up way with other providers.

| Recipient | Target Group |
|---|--|
| Outreach Support to access money advice | To be allocated between P3, Clean Slate and GL11 Community Hub in partnership with GL1 Communities. These partners have established relationships across the district and will deliver support in outreach venues like Community Hubs for people needing access to money advice. Support staff will help people to work through paperwork and get themselves organised to make more better use of advanced money advice services like Citizens Advice. |

2.4 Performance Management and Monitoring

External Monitoring

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 all of the delivery partners, the Council monitors the delivery of this fund and reports this back to GCC at the end of the scheme.

Internal Monitoring

The Chairs and Vice-Chairs of Housing Committee and Community Services & Licensing Committee attend the monthly Cost of Living Working Group that oversees the SDC Cost of Living response. This includes oversight of the HSF Delivery Plan.

In addition, a report on the HSF Delivery Plan will go to Community Services & Licensing Committee.

3. CONCLUSION

- 3.1** The HSF delivery plan outlined here has been developed over the two years that SDC has been allocated this funding. The delivery model builds on established relationships with partners or builds new partnerships to reach target groups. This partnership model enables SDC to reach target groups that would be hard for the Council to reach without significant staff resource.

A partnership delivery model has been adopted by most of the districts in the county as the most effective way to deliver HSF. Good practice in delivery, governance and monitoring has been shared via the Districts' Strengthening Local Communities group.

The model also ensures HSF is delivered in line with good community development principles to build longer term community resilience and wellbeing.

The Cost of Living Working Group will oversee management and monitoring of the HSF Delivery Plan and a report on the HSF will go to Communities Services & Licensing Committee.

4. IMPLICATIONS

4.1 Financial Implications

There are no direct financial implications as a result of this decision. All costs associated with the Household Support Fund will be covered by the grant income from Gloucestershire County Council. All additional resource, for example staff support, will be delivered within existing resources.

Spend will be monitored and residual balances will be carried forward or returned in accordance with the grant agreement.

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4.2 Legal Implications

The Council should enter into grant agreements with the grant recipients which should be drawn up by One Legal.

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, the providers referred to in this report would not 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..."

One Legal

Email: legalservices@onelegal.org.uk

4.3 Equality 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 aims to provide both a good geographical spread of support across the district via the network of community food pantries, plus ensuring that the organisations that are working most closely those that are vulnerable (Citizens Advice, Foodbanks, Community Hubs and specialist support providers) have the support to make a difference.

4.4 Environmental Implications

There are no significant implications within this category.