



Doncaster Council

Report

Date: 14th October 2022

To: Mayor Ros Jones

Report Title: Household Support Fund Oct 22 to March 23

Relevant Cabinet Member(s)	Wards Affected	Key Decision?
Mayor Ros Jones	All	Yes

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. The government has made a third round of Household Support Fund available to Councils in England to support those households most in need to help with global inflationary challenges and the significantly rising cost of living. This funding covers the period 1 October 2022 to 31 March 2023 inclusive and Doncaster Council's allocation is £2,989,273.08.
2. This is the same as the previous amounts of Household Support Fund allocated to Doncaster but once again the criteria set by the government is a bit different. This time, the objective is to provide support to vulnerable households in most need of support to help with significantly rising living costs, in particular but not exclusively for energy costs and food. The amount of funding being made available will only cover certain aspects and some groups of people based on their financial circumstances. Therefore, the Council has had to consider who has the greatest need across the population of Doncaster and look to target as many households as possible.
3. The recommendation is to receive the government funding and award a single payment for food and energy to all households on housing benefit, council tax reduction, universal credit (housing element), free school meals and/or pension credit based on household composition which equates to the following one-off payments:
 - £70 payment to single households;
 - £90 payment to couples;
 - £130 payment to households with 1 dependent child;

- £190 payment to households with 2 dependent children;
- £250 payment to households with 3 dependent children; and a
- £310 payment to households with more than 3 dependent children.

In addition, award £5k each to Doncaster's 21 Food Banks and £15k to the Hygiene Bank.

EXEMPT REPORT

4. Not applicable.

REASON FOR URGENCY

5. This decision will enable immediate financial assistance and support to vulnerable residents and those in need. Rising food and energy costs, with subsequent increased requests for assistance, have highlighted the need to provide this support quickly to avoid undue hardship to residents. Taking this decision urgently will also provide certainty and assurance to those hardest hit by the cost of living crisis.
6. The nature and urgency of the decision means it would not be practical to provide the 28 days' notice normally required for a key decision or to wait for a call In period before implementation. This decision is therefore being taken in accordance with Access to information Rule 16 Special Urgency detailed within Part 4 of the Council's Constitution.

RECOMMENDATIONS

7. To approve the following one-off payments from the Household Support Fund 1 October 2022 to 31 March 2023 to all households on housing benefit, council tax reduction, universal credit (housing element), free school meals and/or pension credit:
 - £70 payment to single households;
 - £90 payment to couples;
 - £130 payment to households with 1 dependent child;
 - £190 payment to households with 2 dependent children;
 - £250 payment to households with 3 dependent children; and a
 - £310 payment to households with more than 3 dependent children.

In addition, award £5k each to Doncaster's 21 Food Banks and £15k to the Hygiene Bank.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR THE CITIZENS OF DONCASTER?

8. This will mean every household in Doncaster on housing benefit, council tax reduction, universal credit (housing element), free school meals and/or pension credit and therefore on the lowest incomes will receive more financial support towards their rising food and energy costs proportionate to the number of people in the household, in particular dependent children. One payment will reduce effort by households to claim, in particular those with children who have previously had to apply separately for school vouchers for each school holiday.

BACKGROUND

9. Additional Household Support Fund has been made available to Councils in England to support those most in need to help with global inflationary challenges and the significantly rising cost of living. This funding covers the period 1 October 2022 to 31 March 2023 inclusive and Doncaster Council's allocation is £2,989,273.08.
10. Councils have discretion on exactly how this funding is used within the scope set out in the government grant determination and guidance. The objective is to provide support to vulnerable households in most need of support to help with significantly rising living costs.
11. For round one of the Household Support Fund for 1 October 2021 to 31 March 2022, at least 50% of the total funding had to be spent on families with children. In terms of type of support, the expectation was that the Household Support Fund should primarily be used to support households in the most need with food, energy and water bills. Therefore, the Council provided the following in line with the set government criteria:
 - £15 a week school holiday food provision through to 31st March 2022 (October, December and February) to children currently in receipt of free school meals and to non-school age and other children where the household was in receipt of a council tax reduction or housing benefit due to low income;
 - A winter £142 fuel payment to the same families and to working age households who do not have children but were in receipt of a council tax reduction or housing benefit due to low income;
 - £5k food for each of the 21 food banks; and
 - £15k to the Hygiene Bank.
12. For round two of the Household Support Fund for 1 April 2022 to 30 September 2022, there were some differences to the government criteria. The first was that at least one third of the allocation must be paid to pensioners. The second, at least one third of the allocation must be spent on vulnerable households with children. Therefore, the Council provided the following in line with the set government criteria:
 - For Easter and May school holidays, the provision of £15 a week school holiday food vouchers to children currently in school and in receipt of free school meals or from a family in receipt of housing benefit or council tax reduction;
 - For Easter and May school holidays, a £15 a week payment for the same period to non-school age children where the household is in receipt of a council tax reduction or housing benefit due to low income;
 - A £100 payment to all Doncaster pensioners on housing benefit or council tax reduction;
 - A £70 payment to all working age households on housing benefit or council tax reduction;
 - £5k food for each of the 21 food banks; and
 - £15k to the Hygiene Bank.

13. For this third round of funding, the criteria is not as specific, low income is obviously a factor with the main consideration being fuel and food costs. Another factor taken into account in line with the government criteria is to consider how much assistance has been received from other government schemes towards the increased cost of living. All households have received assistance with fuel costs and those on benefit or with a disability have received more. In addition, all pensioners have also received a £300 winter allowance, however the ability for extra earnings by pensioners is extremely low. Therefore, the main consideration for this proposal is focused on food costs, although the payment can be used for fuel or food costs.
14. In addition, the government has specified that every area must operate at least part of their scheme on an application basis i.e. residents should have the opportunity to come forward to ask for support. Therefore, the Council will issue payment using already held details where it can which is for most households. However, there will be an on-line application process launched after those payments to allow those who feel they should have been included to apply. This will include those who have become eligible for housing benefit and council tax reduction since the last schemes or who are ordinarily eligible for benefits but who had a nil award in the qualifying period due to, for example, a fluctuation in income.
15. Issuing vouchers to cash in at the Post Office for pensioners who may be digitally excluded proved extremely successful in the last round of funding, therefore the same method will be used again.

OPTIONS CONSIDERED

16. The options that have been considered include:
- a. **Option 1** – To repeat the same payments completed for October 2021 to March 2023 as included in this report.
 - b. **Option 2** – To repeat the same payments completed for April 2022 to September 2022 as included in this report.
 - c. **Option 3** – Ensure all households on housing benefit, council tax reduction, universal credit (housing element), free school meals and/or pension credit benefit from assistance to pay for food and fuel with a sliding scale of one-off payments depending on the number in the household as follows:
 - £70 payment to single households;
 - £90 payment to couples;
 - £130 payment to households with 1 dependent child;
 - £190 payment to households with 2 dependent children;
 - £250 payment to households with 3 dependent children; and a
 - £310 payment to households with more than 3 dependent children.

In addition, award £5k each to Doncaster's 21 Food Banks and £15k to the Hygiene Bank.





Option 3 is the preferred option and proposed within this decision.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDED OPTION

17. Option 3 means all 28,000 low income households on housing benefit, council tax reduction, universal credit, free school meals and/or pension credit in Doncaster will receive financial assistance from this fund to be used for food or fuel. It also means it will be easier for households to understand what they will get and when. Families with children will not have to apply for vouchers from schools when each school holiday occurs, they will be receiving the equivalent in this payment and will receive it quicker. This option also brings into play the number of people in the household which has an impact on the extra costs being incurred within the household and is fairer than smaller households getting the same as larger who incur more costs.

IMPACT ON THE COUNCIL'S KEY OUTCOMES


18.

Great 8 Priority	Positive Overall	Mix of Positive & Negative	Trade-offs to consider – Negative overall	Neutral or No implications
 Tackling Climate Change				✓
Comments:				
 Developing the skills to thrive in life and in work				✓
Comments:				
 Making Doncaster the best place to do business and create good jobs				✓
Comments:				
 Building opportunities for healthier, happier and longer lives for all	✓			


Comments: This financial assistance for all low income households on the various benefits will positively contribute to the health and happiness of households in a financial environment where food and energy prices are increasing at an unprecedented level due to global events.

 <p>Creating safer, stronger, greener and cleaner communities where everyone belongs</p>				✓
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Comments:

 <p>Nurturing a child and family-friendly borough</p>	✓			
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Comments: This package of assistance has specifically been designed with families and children in mind whilst also including others in need. The sliding scale of payments will ensure the payment is aligned with the number of dependent children in the household meaning they also receive the equivalent financial support for school holiday food.

 <p>Building Transport and digital connections fit for the future</p>				✓
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Comments:

 <p>Promoting the borough and its cultural, sporting, and heritage opportunities</p>				✓
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Comments:

Fair & Inclusive	✓			
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Comments: This financial support package has been designed to include all low income households so it is fair and inclusive to all.

19. Legal Implications [Officer Initials: SRF | Date: 10.10.22]

Section 1 of the Localism Act 2011 gives the local authority the power to do anything that individuals may generally do. The funding must be spent in accordance with any guidance provided by Government.

20. Financial Implications [Officer Initials: CC | Date: 14/10/2022]

As indicated in the body of the report, Doncaster Council has been allocated £2,989,273.08 Household Support Fund (HSF) grant to cover the period from 1st October 2022 to 31st March 2023. The cost of these proposals are estimated to be in the region of £2.9m (final cost dependent upon eligibility) and will be fully met by the HSF grant – this is a one-off ring fenced grant that will be payable in arrears following the submission of two quarterly returns outlining activity and spend. Spend must have been incurred in the period up to and including 31st March 2023 to be eligible to be funded from the HSF grant.

The general principle applies that Local Authorities are responsible and accountable for the lawful use of funds under Section 151 of the Local Government Act 1972. The Section 151 Officer within the Local Authority is required to exercise their duties in line with the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) guidance, ensuring their oversight of the proper administration of financial affairs within the Local Authority including these grants

21. Human Resources Implications

There are no HR implications.

22. Technology Implications [Officer Initials: PW | Date: 07/10/22]

No new technology is required to deliver this proposal. A digital application form will be developed to make it as easy and swift as possible for any people who need to apply that are not in our records from previous payments.

RISKS AND ASSUMPTIONS

23. The only risk is that households who are new to claiming housing benefit and council tax reduction do not come forward to apply and provide their bank details. Everything possible will be done to reach these households through communications including letters to households to encourage.

CONSULTATION

24. Conversations have been had within the Council to consider which households are most in need in line with the government criteria.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

25. None.

GLOSSARY OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

26. Not applicable.

REPORT AUTHOR & CONTRIBUTORS

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