

# HAMPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

## Decision Report

<b>Decision Maker:</b>	Executive Lead Member for Children's Services
<b>Date:</b>	22 November 2022
<b>Title:</b>	Department for Work and Pensions Household Support Fund October 2022 to March 2023
<b>Report From:</b>	Director of Children's Services

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### Purpose of this Report

1. The purpose of this report is to outline the proposed approach for allocation of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) Household Support Fund Extension across Hampshire for the period October 2022 to March 2023. This report seeks approval from the Executive Lead Member for spend and grant funding to organisations in support of vulnerable households via the connect4communities programme.
2. The expectation is that the grant should primarily be used to support households in the most need particularly those not eligible for the other support government has recently made available but who are nevertheless in need. The Fund is intended to cover a wide range of low income households in need including families with children of all ages, pensioners, unpaid carers, care leavers and disabled people who would otherwise struggle with energy bills, food and water bills.

## **Recommendation(s)**

3. That the Executive Lead Member note the spend undertaken by the Director of Children's Services for funding to the value of £1,570,718 provided as discretionary grants to schools, colleges and early years settings such that they can provide food and fuel support to vulnerable families.
4. It is recommended that £263,000 is made available to provide £500 to each Hampshire County Council Foster Carer to support them with increasing cost of living.
5. It is recommended that £500,500 is provided in grants to district and borough councils in Hampshire for exceptional housing support which meets the DWP grant criteria as set out in paragraph 18 of the report.
6. It is recommended that a further £1,832,785 is allocated to district and borough councils in Hampshire such that they can provide vouchers to residents in receipt of council tax support and to an additional cohort who receive housing benefits only.
7. It is recommended that the Executive Lead Member approves £350,000 to be allocated as grants to organisations supporting unpaid carers in Hampshire. Such grant will be provided on terms to be agreed by the Director of Children's Services and in accordance with the grant criteria set out in paragraph 18.
8. It is recommended that £78,100 is made available to provide care leavers two £50 food vouchers over the grant period to support with the increased cost of living.
9. It is recommended the Executive Lead Member approves the grant of £500,000 to provide two £50 food vouchers with families open to the Disabled Children's Team and the remaining amount in grants to organisations working children and adults with disabilities for further direct support. Such grant will be provided on terms to be agreed by the Director of Children's Services and in accordance with the grant criteria as set out in paragraph 18.
10. It is recommended that a grant of £600,000 is awarded to the Citizens Advice Service to provide emergency financial support to vulnerable households with fuel bills. Such grant will be provided on terms to be agreed by the Director of Children's Services and in accordance with the grant criteria as set out in paragraph 18.

11. It is recommended that funding of up to £530,000 is provided in grants to support existing community pantries across Hampshire with the increase in cost of food and to organisations seeking to further develop a broader offer alongside the pantries as described in further in detail in paragraph 43. Such grant will be provided on terms agreed by the Director of Children's Services and in accordance with the grant criteria set out in paragraph 18.
12. It is recommended that the Executive Lead Member delegates authority to the Director of Children's Services to approve community grants to organisations delivering services that meet the criteria of the grant for targeted financial support for those in need, in consultation with the Executive Lead Member up to the total value of £500,000.
13. It is recommended that the Executive Lead Member delegates approval to the Director of Children's Services to approve the reallocation of any Household Support Fund remaining or underspent funds from initiatives set out in paragraphs 4 -12 to organisations delivering services that meet the criteria of the grant in consultation with the Executive Lead Member.

## **Executive Summary**

14. This report seeks to detail the proposed approach and allocation of funds for the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) Household Support Fund Extension across Hampshire. A key aim for the connect4communities programme will be to continue to support sustainable and environmentally beneficial food poverty support.
15. Although the grant no longer has ringfenced spend relating to types of households, the grant guidance stresses that the fund is intended to cover a range of low income households including families with children of all ages, pensioners, unpaid carers, care leavers and disabled people. The proposed Hampshire offer has initiatives in place to support these targeted cohorts.

## **Background**

16. On 26 May 2022 the Government announced, as part of measures to provide help with global inflationary challenges and the significantly rising cost of living, that the £421m Household Support Fund (HSF) would be extended from 1 October 2022 to 31 March 2023.
17. The final guidance relating to the grant extension was shared with local authorities on 30 September 2022 ([Household Support Fund: guidance for local councils - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/114422/hsf-guidance-for-local-councils-2022-23.pdf)). The guidance confirms that Hampshire County Council's allocation is £7,124,127.25, to be spent

between 1 October 2022 to 31 March 2023. Despite being a grant extension, any grant underspend from the grant relating to the previous period cannot be carried forward and there are some changes to the grant guidance.

18. The DWP's expectation is that the grant 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. Energy bills may be of particular concern to low income households during the period of the scheme and Local Authorities should especially 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.
19. The main change to the grant for October 2022 – March 2023 compared to previous Household Support Fund allocations is that there is no ringfence of any proportion of the funding for specific cohorts of people. However, there is a requirement for all Authorities to operate at least a part of their scheme on an application basis. This means residents should have the opportunity to come forward to ask for support. There is also an expectation of Authorities to particularly consider those groups who may not have benefitted from any of the recent cost of living support.

## **Consultation**

20. A variety of stakeholders have been consulted so that existing local provision and need can be identified, risks in respect of duplication of funding can be addressed and emerging ideas validated or challenged. This has included engagement with Adult Health and Care, Community Pantries, Citizens Advice Service and District Councils.

## **The Proposed Hampshire Offer**

### **Provision for proactive targeted cohorts**

21. **Low income households with children**
22. A discretionary grant for schools, colleges and early years settings has been awarded by the Director of Children's Services such that the funding would be available to support families during October half term. The discretionary grant award was made up of two elements, one was an amount based on the number of children on roll (as per previous grant rounds) and the second

element was a 20p contribution per day per free school meal eligible child in recognition of the increased costs of food.

23. The value of the discretionary grant to each setting was based on the number of children on roll, uplifted by 20% from the previous grant award in order to provide additional support to families for the cost of school uniforms and other essentials.
24. The element of the discretionary grant relating to the contribution towards the increased costs of food for free school meal eligible children, was for schools only, and was not provided to early years settings and schools that had over 15% of their income held as balances at the end of 2021/22. Any school that required additional funding over and above the amount allocated can apply for additional funding through the Community Grant when it is live.
25. The discretionary grant is not means tested and is not for those in receipt of benefits, schools, colleges and early years setting have the discretion to support families they recognise as being in need. Support may be provided through a food voucher or for wider essentials such as warm clothing, white goods or blankets.
26. The Executive Lead Member is asked to note the spend undertaken by the Director of Children's Services for funding to the value of £1,570,718 provided as discretionary grants to schools, colleges and early years settings such that they can provide food and fuel support to vulnerable families during the October half term and winter period up to 31 March 2023. There are over 183,000 pupils on roll in our schools and colleges, of which just over 32,000 are entitled to means tested free schools meals who could benefit from this funding.
27. Hampshire County Council have 517 foster carers supporting some of the most vulnerable children in Hampshire. In recognition of this approval is also sought for £263,000 to award a £500 food voucher to Hampshire Foster Carers to contribute to the increase in cost of living this winter.
28. **Pensioners, low income households and households that are not in receipt of other government support**
29. It is recommended that grants to a total value of £1,832,785 are distributed to district and borough councils across Hampshire such that they can provide one £20 food voucher to households in receipt of council tax support and £40 to households in receipt of housing benefit only in the lead up to the Christmas period. As per the DWP guidance, those on housing benefits only are being targeted because they are ineligible for other government support with the cost of living. This support will benefit nearly 86,000 households.

30. **Unpaid Carers**

31. The most recent census data from 2011 shows 133,000 people in Hampshire who identified as carers. During COVID, Hampshire County Council worked with voluntary sector partner organisations to successfully distribute funding which reached carers in most need of support.
32. Approval is sought from the Executive Lead Member for Children's Services to delegate authority to the Director of Children's Services to work with organisations that support unpaid carers in Hampshire up to the value of £350,000 during the winter period and in accordance with the grant guidance in paragraph 18.

33. **Care Leavers**

34. It is recommended that £78,100 is awarded for individuals open to our Care Leavers teams to receive two £50 food vouchers, after Christmas and before the end of the grant period to contribute to the increased cost of living. As per the other targeted groups, care leavers will also be able to access the other forms of support on offer. This will benefit 678 care leavers and 103 post 16 children in supported lodging.

35. **Those with disabilities**

36. For children with disabilities, we will target children that have met the threshold to be open to our Disabled Children's Team and that have gateway cards, working with our social care teams and organisations to deliver direct support. There are currently 670 children open to our Disabled Children's Team and 2,000 gateway card holders.
37. For adults with disabilities, we will target adults that have met the threshold for our Adult Health and Care social care teams. Within this cohort, adults that live alone and therefore may be hit harder by the increase in the cost of living will be targeted for support. There are around 6,500 adults with disabilities open to social care that are not in residential accommodation and just over 500 who do not have any care provision in place that would benefit from this grant.
38. It is recommended the Executive Lead Member approves the grant of £500,000 to provide two £50 food vouchers to families open to the Disabled Children's Team in the lead up to Christmas and in the new year and the remaining amount in grants to organisations working children and adults with disabilities for further direct support during the winter period. Such grant will be provided on terms to be agreed by the Director of Children's Services and in accordance with the grant criteria as set out in paragraph 18.

## **Self-referral Application Process**

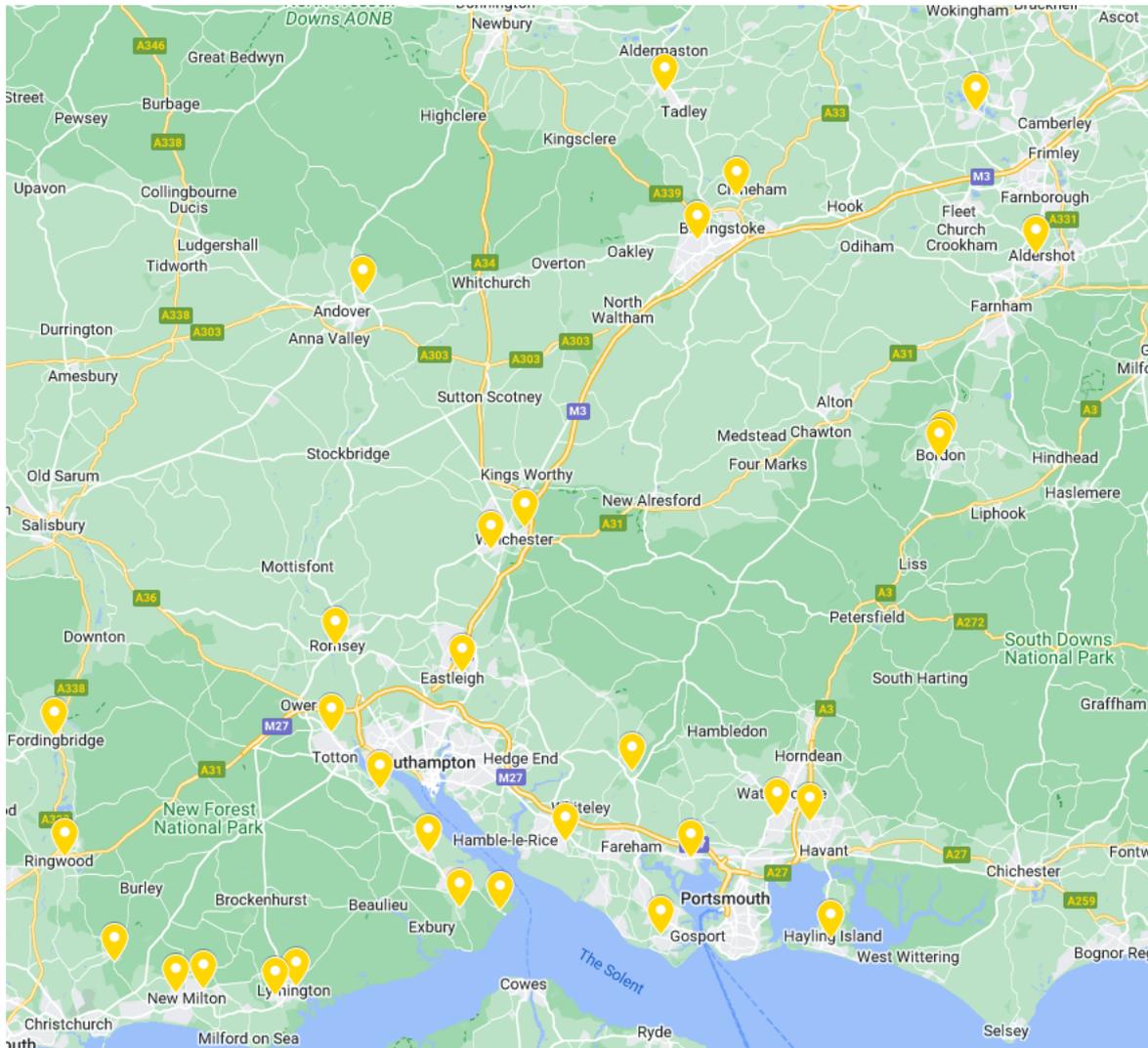
### **39. Utility support**

40. It is recommended that a grant of £500,000 is made available to Citizens Advice to support the most vulnerable households in Hampshire with utility costs during the winter period. We continue to work with Citizens Advice to target support towards energy costs, reduce the potential for double funding and providing the financial support alongside broader support and advice. Citizens Advice are also well placed to undertake ID and benefits checks to mitigate potential risks of fraudulent claims.
41. Citizens Advice require an additional £100,000 to deliver the administration of this scheme in order administer the payments, carry out eligibility and fraud checks and to provide debt relief support if applicable.
42. Whilst there are providers on the market for providing fuel vouchers for pre-payment meters, there is a fee payable for each voucher and there is not yet an offer available for paying fuel bills that are not pre-payment. Conversely there is a wide market of providers who supply easy to use food vouchers with no fee, through the use of food vouchers the programme is freeing up more disposable income which would be available for food costs. This would support an estimated 1,700 households during the winter.

### **43. Community Pantries**

44. Community pantries work on the principle of giving those in need the opportunity to have a 'helping hand' by getting food at a lower rate on a weekly basis. Items found in the pantry will be a range of fresh, frozen and general foods which will change on a weekly basis. Access to the community pantry is by way of membership and, for a small weekly contribution, members receive food to a significantly higher value than if purchased in local shops or the supermarket. For example, members are charged a nominal sum of £5.00 per shop and receive £15 plus worth of goods. Community pantries will be encouraged to provide a delivery service for those who are not able to come and shop for whatever reason.
45. There are 19 fixed venue connect4communities pantries in Hampshire and 11 mobile larders in the New Forest with a current membership of 5,000 households which continues to increase. The map below shows where the pantries are located in yellow.

Map One: Location of connect4communities pantries and larders in Hampshire



46. It is proposed that funding is provided to continue to support the network of community pantries to provide sustainable alternatives to free school meal vouchers and support to any household that is in need. This will be through support to fund the increase in cost of food and gaps from a decrease in donated food, food vouchers for those unable to afford the membership fee and air fryers with associated cook books for those that do not have cooking facilities and need an economical solution.
47. Through the grant, we will also continue to work with organisations to provide a network through which further support can be offered to work with the community pantries to develop a broader support offer including health services, employment support and financial support and advisory services, funded by means other than the DWP Household Support Grant.
48. Approval is sought from the Executive Lead Member for Children's Services to delegate authority to the Director of Children's Services to approve grant

awards to organisations for the delivery of such schemes up to the value of £530,000 through the winter. Through the grant, we will also continue to work with community organisations to broaden the support offer to include wraparound services such as health services, employment and financial support.

#### **49. Community Grant**

50. It is recommended that a grant of £500,000 is made available for organisations who wish to support their local community with food and fuel poverty, particularly in rural areas. Any funded support must meet the DWP grant criteria as set out in paragraph 18, but will be flexible and responsive to local needs as and when they are identified. This fund will also provide support to households who may not be able to access other initiatives set out in this report, for example, chatty cafes to provide food support for mother and baby groups with younger children who may not be in education settings to receive support through these schemes.

#### **51. Exceptional housing support**

52. As in previous DWP Household Support Funds, the grant guidance states that in exceptional cases of genuine emergency and where existing housing schemes do not meet the exceptional need, support for housing costs can be met. It is recommended that £500,500 is distributed to district and borough councils to support households with exceptional housing costs during the winter, as identified in the DWP grant guidance.

53. In the case of providing financial support around housing, eligibility for Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs) must first be considered before emergency housing support is offered through the Household Support Fund. Similarly, the Authority must also first consider whether the claimant is at statutory risk of homelessness and therefore owed a duty of support through the Homelessness Prevention Grant (HPG).

54. The Fund can exceptionally and in genuine emergency be used to provide support for historic rent arrears built up prior to an existing benefit claim for households already in receipt of Universal Credit and Housing Benefit. This is because these arrears are excluded from the criteria for Discretionary Housing Payments. However, support with rent arrears is not the primary intent of the fund and should not be the focus of spend.

55. The Household Support Fund should not be used to provide housing support on an ongoing basis or to support unsustainable tenancies, nor can it be used to provide mortgage support, though homeowners could still qualify for the other elements of the Fund (such as food, energy, water, essentials linked to energy and water and wider essentials). Where a homeowner is

having difficulty with their mortgage payments, they should contact their lender as soon as possible to discuss their circumstances as lenders will have a set procedure to assist.

56. District and borough councils will require £91,000 to administer the exceptional housing and food voucher scheme.

### **Administration Costs**

57. The DWP Household Support Fund guidance allows for reasonable administration costs to be funded from the grant allocation such that enable local authorities, and their partners can deliver the programme.
58. The County Council intends to use up to £420,134 (6%) of the funding to cover reasonable administration costs for all partners which will include relevant staff costs and administration costs of partner organisations.
59. The DWP is keen that a telephone helpline is provided to help signpost households to support funded through the Household Support Fund. It is proposed that the existing Hampshire County Council Childrens Services and General Helplines are used for this purpose and funding will be allocated to provide additional capacity to meet the increased scope of the helpline.
60. Extensive communications are planned to ensure that a range of professional agencies and partner organisations are aware of the connect4communities programme and can signpost vulnerable households to the support being offered.
61. Furthermore, the existing connect4communities directory will be further developed so that organisations and community groups can publish details of any local opportunities or support they wish to share. This is hosted on the Hampshire Family Information and Services Hub:  
(FISH: <https://fish.hants.gov.uk/kb5/hampshire/directory/home.page>)
62. This directory enables residents of Hampshire to search by postcode to identify where they may be able to access financial and other support including subsidised food. For Hampshire County Council and partners, this will provide a way to capture offers of support beyond those coordinated directly by the connect4communities programme, and an effective way of signposting residents to available support.

## Finance

63. A summary of the proposed allocation of funding across the initiatives to be delivered through the connect4communities scheme, funded by the Household Support Fund is set out in table 2.

Table 2:

<b>connect4communities – Hampshire County Council Household Support Fund Extension</b>	
<b>Component</b>	<b>Funding allocation (£)</b>
Education settings discretionary grant	1,570,718
Food vouchers for people in receipt of council tax reduction support and housing benefit	1,832,785
Unpaid carers grants	350,000
Care Leaver food vouchers	78,100
Those with disabilities grants	500,000
Utility Support	500,000
Community Pantries	530,000
Community Grant	500,000
Exceptional Housing support	500,500
Foster carer support	263,000
Contingency	78,890
<b>Sub total</b>	<b>6,703,993</b>
Administration	420,134
<b>Total plan</b>	<b>7,124,127</b>

## Performance

64. All funding granted to third party organisations (including schools, colleges, early years providers and district and borough councils) will be supported by a grant agreement setting out the conditions of the funding as well as reporting requirements.

65. Third party organisations will be required to report to the County Council on how they have spent the funding provided, in line with the DWP grant criteria.
66. The management information required by the DWP for this grant round will require a more granular data collection from grant recipients. For each award as well as the spend and volumes, the number of households is also required. Whereby, if one family received £15 food vouchers from their schools for their 2 children this will be reported as a total spend of £30, with a volume of 2 for 1 household.
67. Spend information is required by;
  - Household composition (household with children, with pensioners, with a disabled person or other)
  - Category (energy and water, food excluding FSM support in the holidays, free school meal support in the holidays, essentials linked to energy and water, wider essentials or housing costs)
  - Type of support (vouchers, cash, third party, tangible item or other)
  - Access route (application based, proactive support, other)

### **Consultation and Equalities**

68. Consultation and engagement have been undertaken as part of developing and delivering the connect4communities programme.
69. School and colleges have previously been consulted regarding their preferred method of supporting children with food by way of a questionnaire.
70. An Equalities Impact Assessment has been completed and will be published in advance of the decision day.

### **Climate Change Impact Assessment**

71. Hampshire County Council utilises two decision-making tools to assess the carbon emissions and resilience impacts of its projects and decisions. These tools provide a clear, robust, and transparent way of assessing how projects, policies and initiatives contribute towards the County Council's climate change targets of being carbon neutral and resilient to the impacts of a 2°C temperature rise by 2050. This process ensures that climate change considerations are built into everything the Authority does.

### **Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation**

72. The carbon mitigation tool and climate change adaptation tools were not applicable on this occasion because the decision relates to a programme that is strategic/administrative in nature.

**REQUIRED CORPORATE AND LEGAL INFORMATION:**

**Links to the Strategic Plan**

<b>Hampshire maintains strong and sustainable economic growth and prosperity:</b>	Yes
<b>People in Hampshire live safe, healthy and independent lives:</b>	Yes
<b>People in Hampshire enjoy a rich and diverse environment:</b>	No
<b>People in Hampshire enjoy being part of strong, inclusive communities:</b>	Yes
<b>OR</b>	

**Other Significant Links**

<b>Links to previous Member decisions:</b>	
<u>Title</u>	<u>Date</u>
<b>Direct links to specific legislation or Government Directives</b>	
<u>Title</u>	<u>Date</u>

<b>Section 100 D - Local Government Act 1972 - background documents</b>	
<p>The following documents discuss facts or matters on which this report, or an important part of it, is based and have been relied upon to a material extent in the preparation of this report. (NB: the list excludes published works and any documents which disclose exempt or confidential information as defined in the Act.)</p>	
<u>Document</u>	<u>Location</u>
None	

## EQUALITIES IMPACT ASSESSMENT:

### 1. Equality Duty

### 2. Equalities Impact Assessment:

See guidance at <https://hants.sharepoint.com/sites/ID/SitePages/Equality-Impact-Assessments.aspx?web=1>

Insert in full your **Equality Statement** which will either state:

- (a) *why you consider that the project/proposal will have a low or no impact on groups with protected characteristics or*
- (b) *will give details of the identified impacts and potential mitigating actions*