

Delegated Cabinet Member Key Decision Report

Decision Maker and Portfolio area	Cllr Arooj Shah Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Economic and Social Reform
Date of Decision	15 October 2021
Subject:	Household Support Grant Funding Allocation
Report Author:	Caroline Lee Head of Revenues and Benefits
Ward (s):	All

Reason for the decision:

The purpose of the report is to request Cabinet Member approval to allocate the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) £2,419,369.23 Household Support Grant funding for Oldham over the period 6 October 2021 to 31 March 2022. The report sets out the proposed allocation of funding across several initiatives including food support for children and young people over the school holiday period and help with the cost of fuel and essential items for vulnerable households.

Summary:

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) has allocated an indicative £2,419,369.23 of funding to the Council to deliver a Household Support Grant scheme covering the period 6 October 2021 to 31 March 2022.

The DWP funds support the delivery of food and fuel support and other essential items to vulnerable families with children and other vulnerable individuals with at least 50% of the funding to be issued to families with children.

The Council needs to confirm delivery intentions to the DWP by 29 October 2021.

What are the alternative option(s) to be considered? Please give the reason(s) for recommendation(s):

Option 1 Covers the range of proposed options for the spend and is set out below

Table: Options for Spend	
Household Support Grant Funding	
Food support for children and young people over the school holidays	£1,789,878
Support with the costs of fuel/boiler replacement and repair via the Warm Homes team	£100,000
Funds to support the provision of essential items through the Local Welfare Provision scheme	£150,000
Emergency housing costs fund	£50,000
Digital lending and gifting programme	£100,000
Administration costs	£50,491.23
Enlisting support, in partnership with funding administered by Action Together, from the voluntary, community, faith and social enterprise (VCFSE) sector to provide support in the following areas	£179,000
Warm clothing/shoes for individuals and families with and without children (including provision for school uniform items)	
Support for those with no recourse to public funds	
Support with essential items for the elderly over winter	
Total	£2,419,369.23

Option 2 The Council could choose not to deliver a package of support to vulnerable residents over the Winter period. As the DWP funding is ringfenced, this would mean returning the funding to the Government

Recommendation(s)

The recommended option is Option 1. This entails spending the full £2,419,369.23 over the Winter Period to support vulnerable households including families with and without children and individuals. This includes supporting children and young people with a food offer over school holiday periods, help for households with fuel costs and digital inclusion support to Oldham residents.

Implications:

*What are the **financial** implications?*

On the 6th October 2021 the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) issued draft guidance and indicative allocations for the Household Support Fund

Grant. Oldham's indicative allocation is £2,419,369.23.

The grant is to fund expenditure outlined in the grant determination from the 6th October 2021 to 31st March 2022. The grant is paid in arrears and Authorities are required to make 2 statements of grant and management information returns (MI). The interim MI report is required by 21st January 2022 and this will be used to determine an interim grant payment. The final MI return is due on the 22nd April 2022 and following verification a final grant payment will be made.

Option 1 outlines the proposed allocation of the grant all of which are in line with the grant conditions. It should be noted that the allocation of £1,789,878 for food support to children and young people includes £577,380 for Easter 2022. This is currently outside the scope of the fund however the DWP are to confirm whether Council's can use funds for Easter 2022 if funds are issued prior to the 31st March 2022. If the DWP do not grant this request the remaining funds will be apportioned across the priority areas identified in the report.

(Nicola Harrop – Finance Manager)

What are the **procurement** implications?

The Commercial Procurement supports the recommendation in the report. The grant funding that will be allocated to the LWP scheme will be used to enhance the current service and a grant funding agreement will need to be put in place with the supplier (Furniture Resource Centre Ltd). (Emily Molden)

What are the **legal** implications?

Recommended option is supported. There is funding and the affected individuals would be the most in need within the borough. It is advised that the Revenues & Benefits team familiarise themselves well with any specific grant funding conditions and ensure that such conditions are adhered to carefully. Support and guidance should be sought from the Commercial Legal team on a continued basis through-out the grant period.
(Alex Bougatef – Group Lawyer – Litigation).

What are the **Human Resources** implications?

Not applicable

Equality and Diversity Impact Assessment attached or not required because (please give reason)

Work through the EIA for Covid 19 has demonstrated increased demand for crisis support services. This funding will help to mitigate the adverse impacts of

Covid on those most at disadvantage – in accordance with the principles of the EIA (Jonathan Downs – Corporate Policy Lead)

*What are the **property** implications?* Not applicable

Risks: The Council needs to set out its proposals on how to utilise the funding in a tight timescale. This report sets out how it can do this linked into past support granted to minimise challenge to its delivery intentions. (Mark Stenson, Assistant Director of Corporate Governance and Strategic Financial Management)

Co-operative agenda The allocation of this funding is consistent with the Council’s co-operative themes of community leadership, partnership working and co-production

Has the relevant Legal Officer confirmed that the recommendations within this report are lawful and comply with the Council’s Constitution? Yes

Has the relevant Finance Officer confirmed that any expenditure referred to within this report is consistent with the Council’s budget? Yes

Are any of the recommendations within this report contrary to the Policy Framework of the Council? No

Reason(s) for exemption from publication: Not applicable

Reason for exemption from call in Exemption from publication on the Forward Plan and call in in accordance with Rule 14 has been approved by the Chair of the Policy Overview and Scrutiny Committee

List of Background Papers under Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972:

Title	Available from
Announcement of Housing Support Grant Fund	Government launches £500m support for vulnerable households over winter - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

Report Author Sign-off:	
Caroline Lee Head of Revenues and Benefits	C. Lee

Date:	15 October 2021
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Household Support Grant Allocation

15 October 2021

1.0 Background

- 1.1 The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) introduced the COVID Winter Grant Scheme in December 2020 to support those most in need with the cost of food, energy (heating, cooking, lighting), water bills (including sewerage) and other essentials. The funding was made available to predominantly support vulnerable families with children particularly affected by the pandemic. Local Authorities could deliver the scheme through a variety of routes including issuing grants to third parties, providing vouchers to households, or making direct provision of food.
- 1.2 Although the direct aim of the programme was not to replicate the provision of Free School Meals over the school holidays, the Council, along with many other Local Authorities, chose to do so. Schools awarded food vouchers (at a rate of £15 per week per eligible child) via the WONDE system to parents of children eligible for Free School Meals. Out of borough children attending Oldham schools were also supported under a reciprocal arrangement with other GM authorities and schools were given a mandate to support children from families with no recourse to public funds. In addition to this support, the Council chose to support families on low incomes with pre-school children (using FSM eligibility criteria), issued funding to Oldham College and Oldham Sixth Form college to support young people eligible for FSM with direct payments, and supported Care Leavers under 25. Funding of £70,000 was also allocated to the Warm Homes team over the Winter period to directly credit pre-payment SMART meters and to fund a boiler repair/replacement service for those in need.
- 1.3 The Winter Grant fund closed on 16 April 2021 and was replaced with a new fund, the Covid Local Support Grant. The Winter Grant scheme was spent in full. The Covid Local Support scheme replicated the objectives and terms of the Winter Grant fund over the period 17 April 2021 to 20 June 2021 and the Council was given associated funding of £229,339. The Local Covid Support grant scheme was extended for a final time from 21 June 2021 to 30 September 2021. The funding and timeframe for the grant was used to support children and young people with food over the Summer holiday period at a reduced rate of £12.50 per week per eligible child for a maximum of 6 weeks. The award was reduced because the Department of Education's (DoE) Holiday Activity and Food Programme was also operational over the same period and in anticipation of the Local Covid Support Grant funding being removed altogether from 30 September 2021 as the country emerged from lockdown. The Council funded any shortfall between the DWP funding and the cost of supporting children and young people over the holiday periods from other resources available to it.
- 1.4 The DWP has now announced the introduction of a new £421 million fund for England; the Household Support Fund, which is operational from 6 October 2021 to 31 March 2021. Oldham's indicative allocation is £2,419,369. Although the Council has discretion over how this funding can be used, the Government's expectation is that it will primarily be used to support the most vulnerable with food, energy and water bills. The Government has said that the fund is not a Covid related support fund. It can be used to support those with essential costs related to those items and with wider essential costs. The grant funding is ringfenced with at least 50% of the funding to be used to support families with children and up to 50% of the funding used to support other households. This may include people not in receipt of welfare benefits.
- 1.5 In cases of genuine emergency, the funds can be used to support housing costs where existing schemes such as Housing Benefit, the housing cost element of Universal Credit, Discretionary Housing Payments and the Homelessness Prevention Grant do not meet this need. It cannot be used to cover mortgage costs but can in exceptional circumstance be used

to cover historic rent arrears accrued prior to a successful claim for Housing Benefit or Universal Credit.

- 1.6 The fund can be used to provide support with essentials that are linked to energy and water. These include sanitary products, warm clothing, soap, blankets, boiler service/repair, purchase of equipment such as fridges, freezers, ovens etc.
- 1.7 The fund can also be used to support wider needs not linked to energy and water. These include but are not limited to support with other bills such as broadband or phone bills and transport related costs such as the cost of repairing a car, buying a bicycle, or paying for fuel.
- 1.8 Those with no recourse to public funds can be supported by the scheme if there is a risk to a child's wellbeing, there are community care needs, or the recipient has serious health problems.
- 1.9 Reasonable costs of administration can be charged to the fund.

2. Current Position

- 2.1 The Council needs to decide on how best to issue the DWP Household Support Grant fund over the period 6 October 2021 to 31 March 2022 and confirm its intention to the DWP by 29 October 2021 (although an earlier decision will be needed internally about the allocation of funding over the October half term). The funds will be paid to the Council in arrears subject to completion of Management Information returns on 21 January 2021 (for spend to 31 December 2021) and on 22 April 2022 (for spend to 31 March 2022). The payment will be adjusted to align with the actual amount of reported eligible grant spend
- 2.2 Delivery of an extensive package of support with food and fuel and other essential items over the winter and following the loss of the £20 Universal Credit uplift, projected increases in the cost of fuel and food and the end of the furlough scheme is consistent with the Council's anti-poverty agenda and digital inclusion strategy. The following options set out a comprehensive package of support working with stakeholders and partners to assist vulnerable Oldham residents over the coming months.

Food Support to Children and Young People

- 2.3 The Government has said that although the Household Support Fund is not designed to replace or replicate Free School Meals, Local Authorities can use the funding to support families over the school holiday periods if they wish. To date, the Council has allocated funding to a wide range of children and young people over the holiday periods since December 2020. The number of children eligible for free school meals has increased since December 2020 from 12,265 during the Christmas exercise to 13,705 on 12 October 2021 and this has increased the weekly cost of the exercise. The Council has also supported young people who are eligible for free school meals at Oldham College and Oldham 6th Form College.
- 2.4 Oldham's offer has been extensive and has included vulnerable families with pre-school children and care leavers under 25 over the holiday period. These groups do not receive support during term times as they are not in school or college, but the wider offer was designed to support vulnerable households with costs of food over holiday periods.
- 2.5 The Council awarded support at a weekly rate of £15 per eligible child/young person for each of the holiday periods until Summer 2021 when the weekly rate was set at £12.50 for a maximum of 6 weeks (£75 per eligible child in total), The reduced rate was set because the Holiday Activities and Food programme was also in operation over the same period and in anticipation of the funding being removed as the country emerged from lockdown. For the

purposes of this new grant, the weekly rate of £15 is proposed to be reinstated to reflect higher costs of food over the Winter period and to re-align with the £3 per school day Department of Education's (DoE) food voucher offer during the pandemic.

2.6 The school holidays covered by the period of the fund are:

- October half term 23 October 2021 to 31 October 2021 (5 school days)
- Christmas holiday 18 December 2021 to 3 January 2022 (11 school days)
- February half term 19 February 2022 to 27 February 2022 (5 school days)

The Easter 2022 holiday covers the period 9 April 2022 to 24 April 2022 (10 school days). Although this period appears to be out of scope for the fund, the Government has suggested that funds issued prior to 31 March 2022 can be spent in April 2022. (NB: On 11 October, 2021 the DWP committed to confirming the exact position to Local Authorities on whether the funds could be used in the Easter 2022 school holiday period. For this report, and until the position is confirmed, the costs for the Easter holiday are included. If the estimated £577,380 funding for the Easter exercise is not required, the funds will be distributed across the priority areas as identified in this report and will be agreed in consultation with the Leader of the Council and the Strategic Director of Communities and Reform)

Table 1: Estimated costs of food offer over school holiday periods

	Estimated Numbers	1. October half term £	2. Christmas 2021 £	3. February Half Term £	4. Easter 2022 £	Total £
Children eligible for free school meals (Oldham schools)	13,705	205,575	452,265	205,575	411,150	1,274,565
Families on low incomes with pre –school children	3,849	57,735	127,017	57,735	115,470	357,957
Oldham College – young people eligible for FSM	381	5,715	12,573	5715	11,430	35,433
Oldham 6th form college – young people eligible for FSM	1,081	16,215	35,673	16,215	32,430	100,533
Care leavers under 25	230	3,450	7,590	3,450	6,900	21,390
Total estimated numbers	19,246					
Total estimated cost		288,690	635,118	288,690	577,380	1,789,878

1. October half term at a rate of £15 per week (5 school days)

2. Christmas holiday 2021 at a rate of £15 per week (11 school days)

3. February half term 2022 at £15 per week (5 school days)

4. Easter holiday 2022 at £15 per week (10 school days)

all options assume maximum award limited to no of school days stated regardless of actual school holiday period

Support with the cost of fuel/ new and replacement boilers

2.7 Over the period of the DWP Winter Grant 2020, the Warm Homes team were allocated £70,000 to support vulnerable households with the cost of fuel. The team also provided support to residents with the costs of new and replacement boilers. It is proposed that £100,000 of the Household Support Grant fund is allocated to support residents over the 2021 Winter period. Details of the full range of support offered by the Warm Homes team is set out here <http://www.warmhomesoldham.org/>

2.8 Support with essential household items

The Local Welfare Provision Scheme has seen an increase in demand over the course of the pandemic, for example the full spend for 2019/20 was £108,692 compared with £141,263 spent by 14 October 2021 in the year 2021/22. This fund supports with the provision of white goods such as ovens, fridges, freezers, beds, sofas, kitchen packs including pans, crockery, kitchen utensils and bedding packs including duvets and pillows. It is proposed that the funding for LWP is increased by £150,000 to cover increased demand over the winter period for these essential items to establish or maintain a home in the community.

2.9 **Support for housing costs**

An emergency fund of £50,000 is proposed to support residents at risk of losing their homes over the winter. The proposal is to work with housing providers in the borough to determine an approach for administering this funding to those in exceptional need. First Choice Homes have already expressed an interest in supporting the Council in administering the Household Support Fund.

2.10 **Digital Inclusion Support – devices/data packages/broadband/mobile phone costs**

£100,000 of the funding is proposed to be used to enhance and widen the access to devices and data package support currently available through the library service. The scheme offers a device lending and/or gifting service along with data support packages which has recently been set up on a small scale. The current offer could be enhanced with support from the voluntary and community sector with a similar scheme (complemented with digital skills confidence building sessions subject to clarification of such sessions being in scope for the grant conditions of this funding). This scheme will help give those who are struggling financially, the ability to access a device and the skills and confidence to feel empowered from the opportunity that digital brings. This will align to the Council's Digital Strategy ¹within the digital community theme which aims to deliver a connected Oldham for everyone.

Support from the Community and Voluntary Sector

2.11 Enlisting support, in partnership with funding administered by Action Together, from the voluntary, community, faith and social enterprise (VCFSE) sector to provide support in the following areas

- Provision of warm clothing and shoes for individuals and families of all ages including children. This offer could include school uniform items.
- Supporting those with no recourse to public funds with essential items
- Provision and delivery of essential supplies over the winter period to the elderly.

Communications

2.12 A communications strategy will accompany the support offered to vulnerable families over Winter and to ensure the right support is signposted to the right people at the right time.

The wider package of financial support available to these groups includes:

- The Holiday Food and Activities Programme
- www.oldham.gov.uk/wecanhelp which lists the support and benefits available for those struggling for food and provisions. This webpage lists support available from the Warm Homes team, Local Welfare Provision support, Council Tax Reduction and more
- Free childcare places of up to 15 hours a week for pre-school children
www.oldham.gov.uk/2yearolds
- Healthy Start vouchers for those who are pregnant or have a child under 4 years old. Eligible residents can get free vouchers every four weeks worth £4.25 to spend on cow's milk, fresh, frozen or tinned fruit and vegetables, infant formula

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[https://committees.oldham.gov.uk/documents/s121193/Tackling%20Digital%20Exclusion_%20Health%20Scrutiny_%2026Jan21%](https://committees.oldham.gov.uk/documents/s121193/Tackling%20Digital%20Exclusion_%20Health%20Scrutiny_%2026Jan21%20)

milk, fresh dried or tinned pulses. Healthy Start vitamins are also available. Applications can be made online at Healthy Start, visit www.healthystart.nhs.uk or by directly requesting an application form from a health visitor or midwife

- Advice from the Welfare Rights, Get Oldham Working and Helpline teams in maximising income and enlisting the full range of support available to residents
- Council Tax Discount for Care leavers under 25
- Financial advice and support available via the Support and Inclusion Team, Citizen's Advice and Step change

3.0 Options

3.1 The table below sets out Option 1: Options for Spend for approval

Table: Options for Spend	
Household Support Grant Funding	
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Support for those with no recourse to public funds	
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Total	£2,419,369.23

3.2 Option 2 The Council could choose not to deliver a package of support to vulnerable residents over the Winter period. As the DWP funding is ringfenced, this would mean returning the funding to the Government

3.3 The recommended option is Option 1. This entails spending the full £2,419,369.23 over the Winter Period to support vulnerable households including families with and without children and individuals. This includes supporting children and young people with a food offer over


school holiday periods, help for households with fuel costs and digital inclusion support to Oldham residents.

Cllr A. Shah, Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Economic and Social Reform

Signed 


Date: 18 October 2021

Anne Ryans, Director of Finance

Signed 

Date: 19 October 2021

Paul Entwistle Director of Legal Services

Signed 

Date: 9 November 2021