

Report to CABINET

Household Support Fund 7 – Utilisation of Grant Allocation

Portfolio Holder:

Cllr Arooj Shah, Leader of Oldham Council and Cabinet Member for Building a Better Oldham and
Cllr Abdul Jabbar, Cabinet Member for Value for Money and Sustainability

Officer Contact: Fran Lautman, Assistant Director of Customer Experience

Report Author: Fran Lautman, Assistant Director of Customer Experience

Monday 7 April 2025

Reason for Decision

This report seeks Cabinet approval to allocate grant funding of £4,264,066.44 from the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) to Oldham Council to deliver the seventh round of the Household Support Fund (HSF) from 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026.

HSF is designed to support vulnerable households in most need with the cost of essentials during the funding period.

Recommendations

To approve the scheme outlined in *Table 1*. The proposed option balances supporting specific cohorts with providing support across a range of low-income households. The scheme proposed will ensure the full grant funding is spent in accordance with the grant funding criteria from the DWP within the limited time allocated.

Data and insight have been used to inform the proposed options in addition to engagement with teams delivering the fund. Four thematic areas have been established to formulate priority areas for allocation of the grant funding:

- Children and Young People – preventing holiday hunger
- Energy costs – delivering urgent and proactive support
- Housing – supporting sustainable tenancies
- Crisis Support – providing a prompt response and signposting to wider support

Table 1: Household Support Fund 7, Recommended Option

Area of Expenditure	£m
Supporting families with children and young people eligible for Free School Meals Helping around 21,000 children and young people including pre-school age, school and college age and care-leavers of college age. Funding will be issued via a supermarket voucher (HUGGG voucher) over the following school holidays: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• May half-term: £15• Summer: £60• Christmas: £40 The total funding across 2024/25 is £115 per eligible child	2.415
Expanding the Holiday Activity and Food (HAF) Programme to low-income households Additional funds for the Holiday Activity and Food programme over the Easter, Summer and Christmas holidays. This expands the offer to low-income households who do not qualify for Free School Meals. Specific sessions will be provided for children and young people living in Temporary Accommodation.	0.100
Delivering urgent and proactive support for rising energy costs Funding fuel vouchers to top up pre-pay meters for households experiencing financial crisis. Support with small measures and advice to increase energy efficiency and reduce energy bills. Signposting and advice around engaging with energy suppliers.	0.395
Providing support in a financial crisis to access food and essential supplies Issuing supermarket vouchers (HUGGG voucher) to provide support quickly in a crisis.	0.325
Supporting sustainable tenancies in order to prevent households from entering Temporary Accommodation Assessing a households financial circumstances ensuring that all other funding and benefits are exhausted before supporting with a bond and/or up to 3 months' rent as a deposit.	0.450
Supporting Pensioners to keep warm over the Winter Providing support from our Local Welfare Provision scheme to issue 'Winter Warm packs' to low-income Pensioners over the age of 80 to help keep warm during the Winter.	0.025
Supporting the Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise sector to distribute funds	0.300

Allocating funds to Action Together to manage and distribute across the VFCSE sector supporting a breadth of low-income households experiencing financial crisis including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Essential warm clothing including coats, blankets, bedding, nightwear and school uniform. • Essential items including culturally appropriate food, toiletries and baby items. 	
Supporting Oldham Foodbank to maintain stock throughout the year	0.040
Scheme delivery costs (capped at 5% of total funds allocated)	
Covering the cost of Helpline Staff, Warm Homes Call handlers, print and postage and communications	0.214
TOTAL	4.264

1 Background

- 1.1 The DWP wrote to County and Unitary councils on 4 March 2025 with notification of grant funding allocations and scheme guidance for HSF 7. A total of £724 million has been made available compared to £842 million in 2024-25.
- 1.2 Oldham Council has been allocated £4,264,066.44 over the 12-month funding period, 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026. Funding must be spent in full within this timeframe. HSF 7 includes a 12% reduction in funding of £574,717.02 when compared to HSF funding allocated to Oldham Council in 2024-25.

DWP Scheme Guidance

- 1.3 The primary objective of the fund is to provide crisis support to vulnerable households in the most need with the cost of essentials. The secondary objective is to provide preventative support to prevent vulnerable households from into – or falling further into crisis.
- 1.4 Authorities should identify and provide support to a broad cross section of vulnerable households to prevent escalation of problems including:
- families with children of all ages,
 - pensioners,
 - unpaid carers,
 - care leavers,
 - disabled people,
 - larger families,
 - single-person households and
 - those struggling with one-off financial shocks or unforeseen events.
- 1.5 The grant should primarily be allocated to support with the costs of essentials for example energy, water and food support and wider essentials such as support with bills, clothing, period and hygiene products, essential travel related costs and one-off payments to prevent a crisis.
- 1.6 Councils should use their discretion on how to identify and support vulnerable households taking into account a wide range of information and how assistance will be provided whether directly by the Authority or through a third party. The Household Support Fund is not limited to residents in receipt of benefits.

-
- 1.7 As part of their offer, every Authority must operate at least part of their scheme via applications - in other words, residents should have the opportunity to come forward to ask for support.
 - 1.8 By exception and where existing household support has been exhausted, councils may allocate HSF to support households with housing costs where existing housing support does not meet this need.
 - 1.9 Authorities must complete a delivery plan in a template provided by DWP to outline the intentions for the fund and the ways in which they intend funding to be allocated. Delivery plans must be submitted to DWP by 30 May 2025. Councils must maintain reliable, accessible, and up to date accounting recording with an adequate audit trail for all expenditure.
 - 1.10 Councils are required to publish information about how to access support funded by Household Support Fund on their website. Publicity should make clear that funding is provided by UK Government and Delivery Plans must be signed off by the Section 151 officer and responsible Cabinet Member before submission to DWP. Admin costs should be kept to reasonable levels and around 5% of total expenditure.

2 Current Position

- 2.1 Data and insight have been used to inform the proposed options in addition to engagement with teams delivering the fund. Four thematic areas have been maintained from the previous round of HSF to formulate priority areas for allocation of the grant funding.

Children and Young People – Preventing Holiday Hunger

- 2.2 As at March 2023, 42.2% of children in Oldham are living in Relative Poverty (DWP, Children in Low Income Families). This is the second highest rate across England only behind Pendle (43.3%).
- 2.3 As of October 2024, Free School Meals eligibility was 35.2% across Oldham (from reception to Year 11). At neighbourhood level, the highest rates are around 63%.
- 2.4 The proposed scheme extends the focus from previous Household Support Fund schemes to prevent child hunger during school holidays. The Oldham scheme will support around 21,000 children from preschool age up to and including young people and care leavers of college age with a supermarket voucher over May half-term at £15, Summer holidays at £60 and Christmas holidays at £40.
- 2.5 The Oldham scheme will also continue to expand access to the Government funded Holiday Activities and Food programme (HAF) scheme by including low-income households above the Free School Meals threshold. This will ensure that children from low-income households can receive a hot meal and enriching activity over the Easter, Summer and Christmas holidays. The offer will also include specific provision for children and young people living in Temporary Accommodation.

Energy Costs – Delivering Urgent and Proactive Support

- 2.6 According to the Spring 2024 Greater Manchester Residents Survey, 55% of Oldham residents reported that it's difficult to afford energy costs in comparison to 48% average across GM. This is set against the context of the 10% annual rise to energy bills effective from October 2024 for the average household in England, Wales and Scotland.

-
- 2.7 The extension of the Household Support Fund continues the investment in the emergency fuel voucher scheme to top up pre-pay meters delivered by the Council's Warm Homes service. An increase in vouchers has been established for this funding period. This support provides a swift response to residents across all low-income households to keep their homes and families warm whilst experiencing crisis. The Warm Homes service also provides energy and tariff advice as well as small preventive measures to increase energy efficiency and to support residents to reduce future energy bills.

Housing – Supporting Sustainable Tenancies

- 2.8 As of February 2025, 642 Oldham households are living in temporary and commissioned accommodation including 752 children.
- 2.9 In response to the housing crisis, it is proposed in accordance with DWP guidance that a proportion of funds are used to support sustainable tenancies in order to prevent families from entering Temporary Accommodation. Each case is assessed to ensure that all other funds for example Discretionary Housing Payments are utilised first as well as a review of household income to ensure that properties are affordable.

Crisis support – providing a prompt response and signposting to wider support

- 2.10 Council and partner services continue to experience increased demand for crisis support. The council Helpline received a 39% increase in calls in February 2025 in comparison to February 2024. Each month Oldham Foodbank delivers around 1,000 parcels, helping around 2,300 people. As of February 2025, deliveries have maintained this level for the last 2 and a half years.
- 2.11 The preferred option includes sustaining Helpline capacity and expertise (captured within scheme delivery costs) to ensure residents can access crisis support and be signposted and/or referred to partner services for wider support including personal budgeting, debt advice and health and wellbeing. We will continue to proactively promote the Helpline service.
- 2.12 Oldham's scheme continues from the previous round of HSF to allocate funds to Oldham Foodbank to increase and sustain stock levels to meet current levels of demand throughout the year.
- 2.13 The recommended option includes supporting residents experiencing crisis to access food and essential items via supermarket vouchers (HUGGG). During the two previous rounds of Household Support Fund, the breadth of teams who can issue supermarket vouchers was increased to ensure crisis support can be provided at the first point of contact wherever possible. This is an important offer ensuring that residents can access essential supplies including sanitary items, personal care goods, nappies, wipes and formula depending on the household needs.
- 2.14 As in previous Household Support Fund schemes, provision has been made for crisis support delivered directly by the council and partners across the voluntary, community, faith, and social enterprise sector co-ordinated by Action Together. This ensures that residents can access support via several routes depending on their needs and circumstances across the range of low-income households outlined in the DWP guidance. This includes older people, people from specific communities, for example; the Romani community and people without resources to public funds.
- 2.15 This Household Support Fund scheme continues to fund the council's crisis support Local Welfare Provision scheme. The scheme can support in a range of circumstances including

but not limited to families under exceptional financial pressure, residents moving into accommodation who were previously homeless, residents fleeing domestic violence and vulnerable older people. For HSF 7, the primary focus will be supporting low-income pensioners with winter warm packs to help keep them warm over the winter.

Scheme Delivery Costs

- 2.16 Costs to administer the schemes will also be incurred as in previous rounds of Household Support Fund. This includes the cost of Helpline staff, Warm Homes call handlers, admin fees, print and postage costs and communications.
- 2.17 The council's Helpline continues as the central point of resident support. Helpline capacity will include resource to handle incoming contact in addition to outbound calling to support with specific campaigns. As in 2024-25, this will include contacting residents who may be eligible for Pension Credit who are not currently claiming. The team will support residents to understand the support available and they will arrange for in person support to meet a resident at home or a convenient location to make a claim. In addition, the Low-Income Family Tracker tool (LIFT) will be used to identify those pensioners who are up to £1k above the threshold for pension credit eligibility. This will enable support, for example through the Warm Homes fund, to be targeted to those pensioners most likely to face hardship through the winter. Moving forwards, we will utilise text messaging wherever possible to target residents who may need support.
- 2.18 A communications plan will be developed to ensure residents are kept informed about the work we are doing to support the most vulnerable and that those residents in need will know how to access support. We will ensure the breadth of support available is promoted throughout the year particularly during the autumn and winter. The plan will also signpost to other support available including from our partners so that residents can get a full view of all the help available to them. The plans objectives are:
- To increase the number of residents accessing the services we signpost to
 - To increase the number of residents accessing the support that our partners offer
 - To maximise resident income
 - To highlight via proactive case studies how residents have been supported
- 2.19 The plan will be co-produced with the Oldham Poverty Action Network in partnership with Action Together to ensure that the resident voice and lived experience informs the plan and support reaches as many residents as possible.

3 Options/Alternatives

- 3.1 The extension of the Household Support Fund scheme continues to provide crisis support to low-income households living in Oldham. The support provided is well established and are all deliverable within the timeframe outlined within the DWP's scheme guidance.

4 Preferred Option

- 4.1 The proposed option balances supporting specific cohorts with providing support across a range of low-income households. The scheme proposed will ensure the full grant funding is

spent in accordance with the grant funding criteria from the DWP within the limited time allocated.

5 Consultation

- 5.1 The four thematic areas outlined within this report reflect the priorities of the administration and there are limited alternative methods of delivery given the grant-funding timeframe.

6 Financial Implications

- 6.1 On 4 March 2025, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) issued final guidance and allocations for round 7 of the Household Support Fund Grant (HSF). Oldham's allocation is £4,264,066.44.
- 6.2 HSF 7 includes a 12% reduction in funding of £574,717.02 when compared to HSF funding allocated to Oldham Council in 2024-25.
- 6.3 The grant is to fund expenditure outlined in the grant determination from the 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026.
- 6.4 Authorities are required to submit a Delivery Plan by 30 May 2025 and make 4 statements of grant and management information returns (MI). The grant will be paid in arrears following DWP verification of these returns.
- 6.5 The table below details the deadline for submission of each MI return.

MI	Deadline
Interim 1 (1 April 2025 to 30 June 2025)	1 August 2025
Interim 2 (1 April 2025 to 30 September 2025)	31 October 2025
Interim 3 (1 April 2025 to 31 December 2025)	6 February 2026
Final (1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026)	8 May 2026

- 6.6 *Table 1* outlines the recommended allocation of the grant, all of which are in line with the grant conditions. This covers the spend of the HSF in full, with no requirement to augment the offer with additional resources.

(Matthew Kearns, Finance Manager)

7 Legal Implications

- 7.1 The recommended option is supported. There is funding available, and the affected individuals would be the most financially in need within the borough. There would be a Council reputational risk if the funding is not utilised and administered to those in need within the borough.
- 7.2 It is advised that the Customer Support Centre Team familiarise themselves well with any specific grant funding conditions and ensure that such conditions are adhered to. Support and guidance can be sought from the Council's Legal team on a continued basis throughout the grant period.

(Alex Bougatef, Interim Borough Solicitor)

8 Equality Impact, including implications for Children and Young People

- 8.1 The proposals aim to address inequality and disadvantage by targeting the Household Support Fund towards residents disproportionately impacted by poverty. The scheme continues to provide vital support for children and young people by extending supermarket vouchers to pre-school age children, young people of college age, and care leavers during key school holiday periods. Additionally, access to the Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) programme has been expanded to include low-income households above the Free School Meals threshold, ensuring more children receive a hot meal and enriching activities during school holidays. Specific support has also been maintained for children and young people living in temporary accommodation.
- 8.2 The scheme also recognises the ongoing financial pressures on low-income households by continuing emergency fuel support, crisis support through supermarket vouchers, and investment in sustainable tenancies to prevent homelessness. The council Helpline and Oldham Foodbank remain key components in providing immediate assistance, signposting to wider support services, and ensuring essential items remain accessible for residents in crisis. The scheme's focus on supporting low-income pensioners with winter warm packs further demonstrates a commitment to protecting vulnerable groups. A completed Equality Impact Assessment is included below.

(Jonathan Downs, Corporate Policy Lead)

9 Key Decision

- 9.1 Yes

10 Key Decision Reference

- 10.1 FCR-02-25

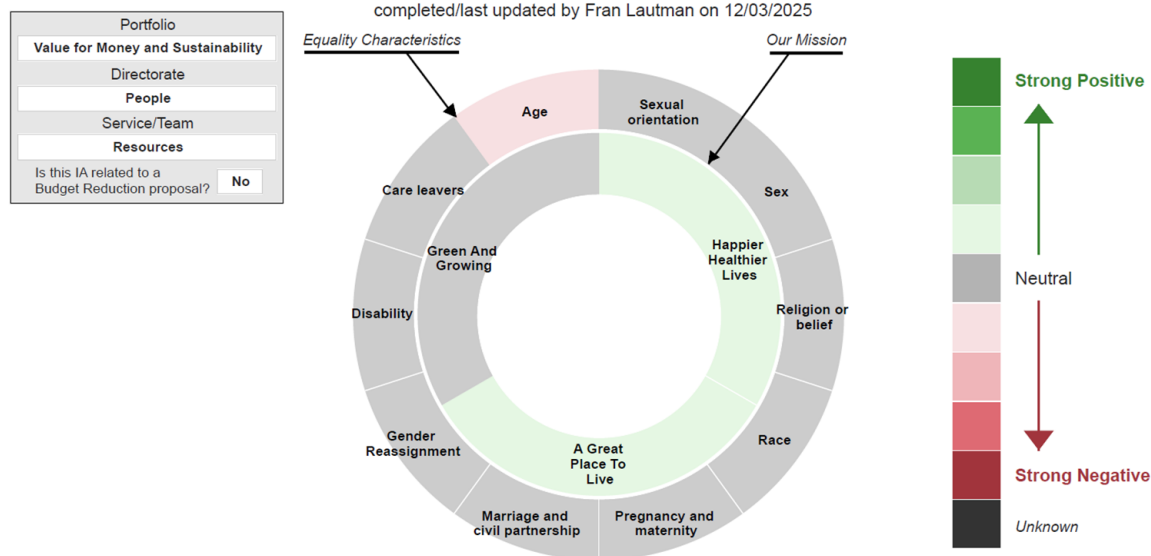
11 Background Papers

- 11.1 None

Appendix A – Equality Impact Assessment

Household Support Fund 7 – Utilisation of Grant Allocation

completed/last updated by Fran Lautman on 12/03/2025



Equality Characteristics

Category	Impact	Likely	Duration	Impact Score	Comment
Age	Moderate Negative	Possible	Short Term	-1	Potential for older residents lacking awareness of how to access support beyond whats available on the council website.
Care leavers	Neutral	Possible	Short Term	0	
Disability	Neutral	Possible	Short Term	0	
Gender Reassignment	Neutral	Possible	Short Term	0	
Marriage and civil partnership	Neutral	Possible	Short Term	0	
Pregnancy and maternity	Neutral	Possible	Short Term	0	
Race	Neutral	Possible	Short Term	0	
Religion or belief	Neutral	Possible	Short Term	0	
Sex	Neutral	Possible	Short Term	0	
Sexual orientation	Neutral	Possible	Short Term	0	

Our Mission / Corporate Priorities

Category	Impact	Likely	Duration	Impact Score	Comment
Green And Growing	Neutral	Possible	Short Term	0	
A Great Place To Live	Moderate Positive	Possible	Short Term	1	The HSF 7 scheme continues to support Oldham households to avoid entering Temporary Accommodation by assessing legibility for the bond and deposit scheme.
Happier Healthier Lives	Moderate Positive	Possible	Short Term	1	The scheme is designed to support residents experiencing financial crisis - there are multiple options in the scheme to support residents including supermarket vouchers, Warm Homes Oldham as well as signposting and/ or referrals to council services and partners.

Negative Impacts

Category	Impact	Likely	Duration	Impact Score	What action can be taken to mitigate the potential negative impacts?	Action(s)	Owner(s)	Timescale(s)	If the negative impacts can't be mitigated, why should the project/decision proceed?
Age	Moderate Negative	Possible	Short Term	-1	Ensure comprehensive comms plan in place to ensure that older residents can access information about the scheme and how to access support. Budget has been set aside for communications.	Draft comms plan to be developed and co-designed with input from Oldham Positive Action Group.	Communications Team	April - May and October - November 2025	Evaluation measures will be in place and engagement with District Teams.