



Delegated decision report

DECISION UNDER DELEGATED POWERS

DECISION CANNOT BE TAKEN BEFORE 1 JUNE 2022

Title **HOUSEHOLD SUPPORT FUND**

Report to **COUNCILLOR DEBBIE ANDRE, CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES, EDUCATION AND LIFELONG SKILLS**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. The purpose of this report is to outline the proposed approach and offer for the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) Household Support Fund extension across the Isle of Wight. This report seeks approval from the Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Education and Lifelong Skills for spend and grant funding to organisations in support of vulnerable households over the Spring and Summer months.

BACKGROUND

2. On 25 March 2022, the government announced an extension to the Household Support Fund as targeted financial support for those in need over the Spring and Summer period. Guidance and grant determinations were confirmed on 20th April 2022
3. The £421 million Household Support Fund is being distributed through County and Unitary Councils and is to be used primarily to support households in the most need with utility costs, food, and water bills. 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.
4. The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), the government department that is providing the funding, expects top tier local authorities to administer the scheme and provide direct assistance to vulnerable households and families with children particularly affected by the pandemic. Rather than focus on one specific vulnerable group, Authorities should use the wide range of data and sources of information at their disposal to identify and provide support to a broad cross section of vulnerable households in their area. Support is not restricted to vulnerable households in receipt of benefits. Therefore, Authorities should also use other sources of information to identify vulnerable households, including advice from professionals who come into contact with vulnerable households such as social workers and Supporting Families advisors.

5. The conditions of the Household Support Fund extension are that at least 33% of the total spend will be ring-fenced to support households with children, a minimum of 33% of the total spend ring-fenced to support households with pensioners with no more than 33% of the total spend being used to support other households genuinely in need of support. This may include households not currently in receipt of DWP welfare benefits.
6. The Isle of Wight's share of the Household Support Fund is £1,131,576.08, to be spent between 1st April 2022 and 30 September 2022.
7. The Household Support Fund is similar to previous DWP funding through the Covid Winter Grant and the Covid Local Support Grant, administered by IWC and known as the connect4communities programme.
8. A Delegated Decision was taken, by the Cabinet member, on 31st March 2022 to approve the distribution of £154,500 funding to schools, colleges, and early years providers across IOW such that funding could reach schools in sufficient time for them to purchase and distribute vouchers before the children break up for the two-week Easter half-term.
9. Meal vouchers were being made available to:
 - All children who are eligible for benefits-related Free School Meals (FSM)
 - All children with a social worker
 - All children open to early help services
 - 16–18-year-olds previously eligible for FSM
 - All 2–4-year-olds accessing childcare and eligible for Early Years Pupil Premium.

CONSULTATION

10. Consultation with internal departments, in addition the Citizens Advice IOW was undertaken to determine the wider need of specific cohorts and how best to utilise the funding.
11. In addition to these meetings, engagement has been made with the existing pantries to ascertain the required level of onward funding.
12. This engagement has resulted in an offer, under the programme name connect4communities, proposed across IOW.

THE IOW OFFER

13. **Food Voucher scheme**

14. It is recommended that the Cabinet Member approves the grant of £635,000 to purchase food vouchers for residents in receipt of Local Council Tax Support who are also eligible for Pension Credit Guaranteed Credit, benefits-related Free School Meals, or have no children or pensioners in residence. The vouchers will be available via an application process and the value of the voucher will depend on the benefit received.
- (a) One-off £125 food voucher for residents eligible for Local Council Tax Support and Pension Credit Guaranteed Credit
 - (b) One-off £50 food voucher per household eligible for Local Council Tax Support and benefits-related Free School Meals.
 - (c) One-off £25 food voucher for residents eligible for Local Council Tax Support where there are no children or pensioners living at the property.

15. **Support for food and utility costs**

16. It is recommended that a grant of £60,000 is made available to Citizens Advice for two initiatives.
17. Citizens Advice will use the funding to provide a single point of contact for IOW residents to understand the sources of support that may be available to them through the connect4communities programme, and via other means. This will be via the existing Help Through Crisis Helpline ([Isle Help - Help Through Crisis \(iow.gov.uk\)](https://www.iow.gov.uk/help-through-crisis)).
18. Secondly, Citizens Advice will use the funding over the next 6 months to provide food vouchers as well as direct financial support to households with fuel bills that do not meet the eligibility criteria for the food voucher scheme.
19. It is felt that targeting this funding at fuel bills will reduce the potential for double funding with other grants available and asking Citizens Advice to administer this fund will ensure that any financial support can be provided alongside broader support and advice. Citizens Advice are also well placed to undertake ID and benefits checks to mitigate the potential risks of fraudulent claims. IOW Council may require Citizens Advice to target communities where there is specific local need.
20. It is anticipated that over 600 households will benefit from this funding.
- ### 21. **Community Pantries**
22. It is proposed that funding is provided to establish two new community pantries across the Island and approval is sought from the Cabinet Member to delegate authority to the Director of Children's Services to approve grant awards to organisations for the delivery of such schemes in consultation with the Executive Lead Member up to the value of £50,000.

23. Analysis of data is underway to identify where the optimum locations for the new pantries are, using benefits claimant data, free school meals data and feedback from stakeholders.
24. The aim of this funding would be to expand the network of community pantries across the Island, thus developing the experience and expertise to continue establishing further pantries if required in the future. Proactive exploratory discussions are underway with schools, community groups and family hubs to identify suitable locations and organisations with the ethos and interest to operate a community pantry. Furthermore, organisations will be able to apply for grant funding should they wish to operate a community pantry on the Isle of Wight.
25. It is also proposed that funding of £45,000 is approved to further support the three existing pantries on the Isle of Wight, to continue providing a sustainable source of food for those in need.
26. 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. For example, members are charged a nominal sum of £5 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.
27. **Community Grants**
28. A fund of £40,000 has been identified to develop local initiatives where community groups can apply for funding to support the community with food and fuel initiatives.
29. It is recommended that the Cabinet Member delegates authority to the Director of Children's Services to approve grant awards to organisations delivering services that meet the criteria of the grant (as set out in paragraph 12) for targeted financial support for those in need over the grant period in consultation with the Executive Lead Member up to the value of £40,000.
30. **Exceptional Housing Costs**
31. A key difference between previous DWP Winter and Local Support Grants is the inclusion of financial support for exceptional housing costs being permissible expenditure under the Household Support Fund.
32. 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).

33. 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.
34. 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.
35. In assessing cases where exceptional housing support may be required, the connect4communities team will work the IWC's Homeless Prevention team and Revenues and Benefits team to establish eligibility and the value of any financial support on a case-by-case basis, in accordance with the DWP criteria set out in paragraphs 32-34.
36. It is recommended that £30,000 is made available to fund exceptional housing support.
37. **Administration and Communication Costs**
38. The Household Support Fund allocation includes reasonable administration costs to enable local authorities to deliver the scheme and it is therefore permitted for IWC (and partners) to deduct estimated administration costs from the total allocation to determine the amount remaining.
39. IWC is seeking to minimise administration costs and approval is therefore sought for funding of up to £71,857 (6.4%) to cover reasonable administration costs for all partners which will include limited staff costs, web page design communications and marketing support, along with the administration of the Food Voucher Scheme.

FINANCIAL / BUDGET IMPLICATIONS

40. A summary of the proposed funding across the initiatives to be delivered through the connect4communities scheme is set out in table 1:

Table 1:

connect4communities – IOW's Household Support Fund	
Component	Funding Allocation (£)
- Meal Vouchers (Easter 2022)	154,500
- £15 per child per week <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o All FSM eligible children; plus o All children open to a social worker; plus o All children open to early help Plus all post-16 students previously eligible for FSM <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Plus, Early Years pupil premium children 	
Food Voucher Scheme	635,000
Grant to Citizens Advice for Open Access to Individuals	60,000
Community Pantries	95,000
Community Grants	40,000
Exceptional Housing Costs	30,000
Administration costs	71,857
Sub-Total	1,086,357
Contingency	45,218
Total Plan	1,131,576

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

41. The council are limited to the use of the funds within the restrictions of the DWP.
42. All funding granted to third party organisations (including schools, colleges, and early years providers) will be supported by a grant agreement setting out the conditions of the funding as well as reporting requirements.
43. Third party organisations will be required to report to the Council on how they have spent the funding provided, in line with the DWP grant criteria set out in paragraph 5.
44. Allocation of funding across the grant criteria set out in paragraph 5 should be monitored to ensure spend remains compliant with the terms of the grant.

EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY

45. Consultation has been undertaken with internal departments and Citizens Advice IOW.
46. An Equalities Impact Assessment has been completed and is included as Appendix 1 to this report.

RECOMMENDATION

The Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Education and Lifelong Skills is recommended, following receipt of the connect4communities report, to agree the following (under delegated authority granted by the Leader of the Cabinet to that Cabinet Member):

47. That approval of funding of up to £635,000 to be granted to provide multi-value food vouchers to households in receipt of Local Council Tax Support who are either also eligible for Pension Credit Guaranteed Credit, benefits-related Free School Meals or who have no children or pensioners living at the property.
48. That a grant of £60,000 be made available to Citizens Advice for them to use to financially support households with fuel bills over the 6-month period and provide a telephone signposting service to the connect4communities programme. 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 5 to this report.
49. That the approval of £95,000 be used to expand and support the network of community pantries across the Isle of Wight, offering a more sustainable approach to helping households.
50. That delegated authority be granted to the Director of Children's Services to approve community grant awards to organisations delivering services that meet the criteria of the grant (as set out in paragraph 5 of this report) for targeted financial support for those in need until 30 September 2022 in consultation with the [Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Education and Lifelong Skills](#) up to the value of £40,000.
51. That delegated authority be granted to the Director of Children's Services, in consultation with the Cabinet Member, to agree the fund of £30,000 to be used to assist exceptional and genuine emergency cases with housing costs in accordance with DWP grant conditions.
52. That delegated authority be granted to the Director of Children's Services to approve the reallocation of any Household Support Fund scheme remaining or underspent funds to organisations delivering services that meet the criteria of the grant in consultation with the Cabinet Lead Member. This will ensure that where spend does not meet the approvals set out in this report, the Isle of Wight Council can rapidly adapt the approach to ensure needs are met.

APPENDICES ATTACHED

53. Appendix 1 - Equality Impact Assessment

BACKGROUND PAPERS

N/A

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