



# Delegated decision report

## DECISION UNDER DELEGATED POWERS

DECISION CANNOT BE TAKEN BEFORE 29 NOVEMBER 2021

Title **HOUSEHOLD SUPPORT FUND**

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

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### 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* 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 this winter.

### BACKGROUND

2. On 30 September 2021, the government announced a significant package of extra targeted financial support for those in need over the winter period. Guidance and grant determinations were confirmed on 5 November 2021.
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 food, energy, 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 are that at least 50% of the total funding will be ring-fenced to support households with children, with up to 50%

of the total funding to other households genuinely in need of support this winter  
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 06 October 2021 and 31 March 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.

## CONSULTATION

8. Stakeholders were provided with a briefing about the Household Support Fund on 22<sup>nd</sup> October and were asked to provide feedback about how best to utilise the funding. This was followed up with an IOW task and finish group meeting which convened on 3 November comprising representatives of major stakeholder groups including representatives of the voluntary and charitable sector, Adults Social Care, Housing, Revenues and Benefits, Finance, Schools, and Children's Social Care.
9. In addition to weekly task and finish group meetings, a variety of other stakeholders have been consulted such that existing local provision and local need can be identified, risks in respect of duplication of funding can be addressed and emerging ideas validated or challenged. This additional engagement has included foodbanks, schools, youth clubs, community groups, and town and parish councils
10. This engagement has resulted in an offer, under the programme name Connect4Communities, proposed across IOW.
11. A Delegated Decision was taken, by the Cabinet member, on 12<sup>th</sup> October 2021 to approve the distribution of £139,395 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 October half-term.
12. Meal vouchers are being made available to:
  - All children who are eligible for 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.

## THE IOW OFFER

13. **Free School Meal Vouchers – Christmas Holidays and February Half-Term**
14. It is recommended that the Cabinet Member approves the grant of £237,630 funding to schools, colleges and early years setting for them to purchase and provide:
  - (a) one £15 voucher per child per week for the two-week Christmas holiday.
  - (b) and one £15 voucher per child per week for the one-week February half term holiday.
15. Vouchers will be available for all children eligible for free school meals and additionally all children with a social worker, all children open to early help, 16–18-year-olds previously eligible for FSM, all 2–4-year-olds accessing childcare and eligible for Early Years Pupil Premium, as described in paragraph 12 of the report. Over 5,454 children will be able to access vouchers as a result of this initiative
16. **Care Leavers**
17. It is recommended that the Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Education and Lifelong Skills through delegated decision, approves the purchase of a £50 food or fuel voucher for each care leaver, to the value of £7,500. An estimated 150 care leavers will receive these vouchers with the intention that they form part of the established care leavers gift scheme delivered by the Children's Services Department.
18. **Support for Utility Bills and Signposting across the connect4communities Initiatives**
19. It is recommended that a grant of £30,000 is made available to Citizens Advice for two initiatives.
20. Firstly, 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)).
21. Secondly, Citizens Advice will use the funding to provide supermarket or food bank vouchers for food as well as direct financial support to households with fuel bills over the winter period.
22. Following engagement with key stakeholders, 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.

23. It is anticipated that over 300 households will benefit from this funding.

24. **Holiday Activities and Food**

25. During the February 2022 half term, it is proposed that, working with schools, voluntary and charitable organisations and early years providers, a holiday activity and food (HAF) programme is organised. The February programme will provide not only a hot meal for vulnerable children, but also fun and educational activities too and will be accessible to children eligible for FSM, over 3,300 children on the Isle of Wight. This programme will build upon the success of the Connect4Communities Holiday Activities and Food programme that has run successfully across IOW during the Easter, Summer and Christmas holidays in 2021. It is recommended that the Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Education and Lifelong Skills delegates approval to the Director of Children's Services to approve grant awards to organisations for the delivery of such schemes in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Education and Lifelong Skills up to the value of £30,000

26. It is further recommended that this funding is made available for HAF providers delivering schemes over the Christmas 2021 and February 2022 holidays, to provide extended family cookery sessions, following which participants will be able to take home the food and recipes. Not only encouraging family interaction by learning to cook together, these sessions would also inspire affordable, healthy eating for current and future generations

27. **Community Pantries**

28. It is proposed that funding is provided to establish and support 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 £125,000

29. 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.

30. Analysis of data is underway to identify where the optimum locations for pantries are, using benefits claimant data, free school meals data and feedback from stakeholders.

31. The aim of this funding would be to ensure a network of four / five community pantries is in place across the Island, thus developing the experience and expertise to establish 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.

**32. Community Grants**

33. There are a significant number of agencies, notably voluntary and charitable sector providers and after school clubs, supporting vulnerable families, households, and individuals. There are also a number of organisations who wish to support their local community with food and fuel poverty, particularly in rural areas. It is proposed that a small, countywide grant fund is established where such organisations can apply for funding to expand or deliver support and services. Any funded support must meet the DWP grant criteria but use of such a grant fund will enable a flexible and responsive approach to addressing local needs as and when they are identified.

34. 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 winter in consultation with the Executive Lead Member* up to the value of £200,000.

**35. Support for Individuals**

36. 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.

37. 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).

38. 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.

39. 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.

40. In assessing cases where exceptional housing support may be required, the Connect4Communities team will work the IWC's 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 37-39

41. In allocating the Household Support Fund, DWP require authorities to use a 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. To ensure that a broad range of vulnerable households benefit from this funding, it is proposed that a direct financial award is made to each household in receipt of specific welfare benefits. The eligible cohort to benefit from this financial award is currently being explored with Revenues and Benefits Teams, Citizens Advice and through analysis of Universal Credit data provided by DWP to ensure that any such awards do not duplicate other sources of support provided.
42. It is recommended that the decision about the specific beneficiaries of this direct funding is delegated to the Director of Children's Services, in consultation with the Cabinet Member. It is recommended that £250,000 is made available to fund such direct financial support to vulnerable households.
43. **Administration and Communication Costs**
44. 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.
45. IWC is seeking to minimise administration costs and approval is therefore sought for funding of up to £56,788 (5%) to cover reasonable administration costs for all partners which will include limited staff costs, web page design and communications and marketing support

#### FINANCIAL / BUDGET IMPLICATIONS

46. A summary of the proposed funding across the initiatives to be delivered through the Connect4Communities scheme is set out in table 1:

Table 1:

<b>Connect4Communities – IOW's Household Support Fund</b>	
<b>Component</b>	<b>Funding Allocation (£)</b>
- <b>Meal Vouchers</b> (October and December 2021, February 2022) £15 per child per week <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o All FSM eligible children, plus</li> <li>o All children open to a social worker, plus</li> <li>o All children open to early help</li> </ul> Plus all post-16 students previously eligible for FSM <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Plus, Early Years pupil premium children</li> </ul>	377,025
Care Leavers Vouchers	7,500
Grant to Citizens Advice for Open Access to Individuals	30,000
Targeted Grant Fund	200,000
Connect4Community Extended HAF Delivery	30,000
Community Pantries	125,000
Support to Individuals including Exceptional Housing Costs	250,000
Administration costs	56,788
Sub-Total	1,076,313
Contingency	55,263
<b>Total Plan</b>	<b>1,131,576</b>

### LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

47. The council are limited to the use of the funds within the restrictions of the DWP.
48. 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.
49. 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.
50. 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

51. Consultation has been undertaken through the task and finish group and by way of presentations to a range of interested and representative groups including charitable and voluntary sector, Adults social care, Housing, Children's social care and Schools.
52. An Equalities Impact Assessment has been completed and is included as Appendix 1 to this report.

## RECOMMENDATION

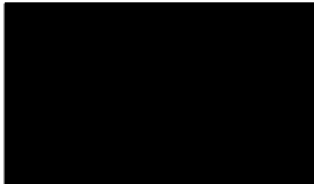
That the Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Education and Lifelong Skills following receipt of the Connect4Communities report on 19 November 2021, agrees the following (under delegated authority granted to her).

53. That the funding of up to £237,630 be approved to be granted to schools, colleges, and early years settings to provide Free School Meal Vouchers of £15 per child, per week for children meeting the eligibility criteria set out in paragraph 12 covering the Christmas 2021 and February 2022 half-terms
54. That the purchase of a £50 food or fuel voucher for each care leaver be approved, to the value of £7,500 such that vouchers and/or gifts and/or food can be provided to care leavers not in receipt of vouchers through the free school meal voucher offer.
55. That a grant of £30,000 be approved and be made available to Citizens Advice for them to use to financially support households with fuel bills over the winter 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 and that the Director of Children's Services be granted delegated authority to agree such terms.
56. That the Director of Children's Services be granted delegated authority to approve grant awards to Holiday Activity and Food scheme providers to deliver extended schemes during the Christmas 2021 holiday and to operate holiday activity and food programmes over the February 2022 half term. Such individual grant awards will be made in compliance with the criteria for the grant and in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Education and Lifelong Skills up to the value of £30,000
57. That the Director of Children's Services be granted delegated authority to approve community grant awards to organisations delivering services that meet the criteria of the grant (as set out in paragraph 5) for targeted financial support for those in need over winter in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Education and Lifelong Skills up to the value of £200,000.
58. That a total of £125,000 be approved to be used to establish and support a network of community pantries across the Isle of Wight, offering a more sustainable approach to helping households
59. That the Director of Children's Services, in consultation with the Cabinet Member, be granted delegated authority to agree the eligibility criteria for direct financial awards to vulnerable households to a total value of £250,000.
60. That the Director of Children's Services be granted delegated authority to approve the reallocation of any Household Support Fund scheme remaining or underspent funds to organisations delivering services that meet the

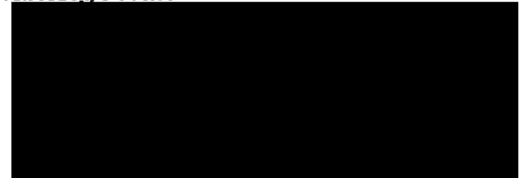


criteria of the grant in consultation with the Cabinet Lead Member. This will ensure that where spend does not meet the approvals set out in this report, the Isle of Wight Council can rapidly adapt the approach to ensure needs are met.

Contact Point: Suzanne Smith, Assistant Director, Children's Services, ☎ 07793 759047 [Suzanne.smith2@hants.gov.uk](mailto:Suzanne.smith2@hants.gov.uk)



Steve Crocker  
*Director of Children's Services*



(CLLR) DEBBIE ANDRE  
*Cabinet Member for Children's Services,  
Education and Lifelong Skills*

Decision  
Signed

Steve Crocker



## APPENDIX ATTACHED

61. Appendix 1 - Equality Impact Assessment

**Name of project or proposal (required):** COVID Household Support Fund known as the Connect4Communities Programme

**Name of accountable officer (required):** Suzanne Smith

**Email (required):** suzanne.smith2@hants.gov.uk

**Department (required):** Children's Services

**Date of assessment (required):** 08/11/2021

**Is this a detailed or overview EIA? (required):** Overview

**Describe the current service or policy:**

The DWP COVID Household Support Fund will provide £1,131,5776 of funding to the Isle of Wight Council to support those most in need, with costs of food, energy, and water bills and essential household costs. The grant conditions state the primary use of the fund should be on food, energy, and water bills with at least 50% of the fund spent on families with children and up to 50% on other households including individuals. A variety of initiatives have been identified working with education establishments and local community partners to ensure households who are most vulnerable have access to food and fuel this winter.

**Geographical impact (required):** All IOW

**Describe the proposed change:**

The COVID Household Support Fund is aimed at vulnerable families, particularly those with children and individuals and will offer financial support with food and energy bills this winter. Working with schools, colleges and early years providers, the proposed programme will deliver food vouchers and other financial support to a wide range of vulnerable families for school holiday periods between Christmas and the end of the financial year. We will provide direct financial support to households through Citizens Advice and other voluntary sector organisations working directly with vulnerable families and will establish a holiday activities scheme for Christmas 2021 and February 2022 half terms. Through grant funding, the programme will provide a range of community led projects to meet local needs across the Isle of Wight.

**Who does this impact assessment cover? (required):** Service users

**Has engagement or consultation been carried out? (required):** Yes

**Describe the consultation or engagement you have performed or are intending to perform:**

After notification, a task group formed with representatives from major stakeholder groups including the voluntary and charitable sector, Adult Health & Care, Children's Social Care, Early Years and Wraparound Childcare, and Communications. A variety of other stakeholders have been consulted so existing local provision and need could be identified and minimise risks in respect of funding duplication. Other consulted groups include head teacher groups, faith groups and local resilience centres/hubs. The engagement created the offers under a programme name of 'Connect4Communities'.

**Age (required):** Positive

**Impact (required):** Children, families and individuals who are vulnerable (eligible for benefits, allocated a social worker or in a low-income setting) or find themselves in hardship due to the impact of COVID 19, this programme, with signposting from agencies, will help to identify and help those people to ensure they have access to food and heating this winter, as well as other basics which may be identified such as cooking facilities, bedding, or other essentials.

**Disability (required):** Positive

**Impact (required):**

Children, families, and individuals with disabilities and who are vulnerable (eligible for benefits, allocated a social worker or in a low-income setting) or find themselves in hardship due to the impact of COVID 19, this programme, with signposting from agencies, will help to identify and help those people to ensure they have access to food and heating this winter, as well as other basics which may be identified such as cooking facilities, bedding, or other essentials.

**Sexual orientation (required):** Neutral

**Race (required):** Neutral

**Religion or belief (required):** Neutral

**Gender reassignment (required):** Neutral

**Gender (required):** Neutral

**Marriage or civil partnership (required):** Neutral

**Pregnancy and maternity (required):** Neutral

**Poverty (required):** Positive

**Impact (required):** Additional funding will be distributed to help those children, families and individuals who live in poverty or are in need of food, energy, and other basic items, should have more access to help.

**Rurality (required):** Neutral

Any other brief information which you feel is pertinent to this assessment (optional):

Please confirm that the accountable officer has agreed the contents of this form  
(required): Yes