

## **CABINET**

**18 OCTOBER 2022**

### **HOUSEHOLD SUPPORT GRANT: 2022/23 Q3/4 ALLOCATION AND FREE SCHOOL MEALS**

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Gary Hackwell, Portfolio Holder for Business Management

Report from: Phil Watts, Chief Operating Officer

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#### **Summary**

This report sets out a proposal to use the latest round of funding allocated to the Council through the Household Support Fund for the period 1 September 2022 to 31 March 2023.

#### **1. Budget and policy framework**

- 1.1. Matters relating to grant funding to support Medway's population are a matter for Cabinet. The Cabinet is asked to accept this as an urgent item for the reasons set out below.
- 1.2. On this occasion it has not been practicable to provide 28 clear days' notice, nor 5 clear days' notice, therefore, the Chairman of the Business Support Overview and Scrutiny Committee has agreed that the taking of these decisions are urgent and cannot be reasonably deferred until the next Cabinet meeting on 15 November 2022, in accordance with Section 11 (Cases of special urgency) of the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements)(Meetings and Access to Information)(England) Regulations 2012 and Rule 17 (Special Urgency) of the Access to Information Rules (Part 2 of Chapter 4 in the Constitution). This is because it is imperative that the Council takes urgent action to support individuals and families in Medway in line with the Government's announcement to implement the Household Support Grant.
- 1.3. Additionally, and in line with rule 15.11 of Chapter 4, Part 5 of the Constitution, call-in can be waived where any delay likely to be caused by the call-in process would seriously prejudice the Council's or the Public's interests. The Chairman of the Business Support Overview and Scrutiny

Committee has agreed that the decisions proposed are reasonable in all the circumstances and to them being treated as a matter of urgency and to waive call-in.

## 2. Background

- 2.1. Since November 2020 the government has continued to provide financial support to vulnerable children and families via local authorities, with allocations frequently announced a short notice and in advance of the publication of any grant conditions or guidance.
- 2.2. The first scheme was announced on 8 November 2020 as the Covid Winter Grant Scheme through which Medway was allocated £908,596 for the period December 2020 to the end of March 2021. The government later (April 2021) would rename the Covid Winter Grant scheme as the Covid Local Support Grant. On 27 November 2020 using the urgency provisions, the Leader agreed the following:
  - £270,000 for weekly holiday hampers at £15 per week to be provided to Free School Meal (FSM) eligible children (then 6,000) for all school holidays in the period (two weeks in the Christmas holidays and the February half term);
  - £220,000 top up for the existing Emergency Assistance Grant scheme;
  - £143,000 for early help and social care direct support packages;
  - £50,000 donation to food charities and BAME support charities; and
  - £100,000
  - £125,296 balance to cover reasonable administration costs of the Council.
- 2.3. Also on 8 November 2020 the government announced that following a series of national pilots between 2018 and 2020, the Holiday Activities and Food programme (HAF) would be expanded to all authorities from 2021, to provide Free School Meal (FSM) eligible children with food and activities over the 2021 Spring, Summer, and Winter holidays. The Council's allocation for 2020/21 was £112,140 while the allocation for 2021/22 was £1,002,990. On 18 February 2021 using the urgency provisions, the Leader agreed the following:
  - £75,000 to recruitment of a workforce to support the project;
  - £37,500 to design and implement a single point of access website-based booking system for HAF activities; and
  - £1million award of funding to holiday club providers based on 9,400 FSM eligible children at 6 weeks provision, 24 sessions per child.
- 2.4. On 14 April 2021 the government renamed the Winter Support Grant to the Covid Local Support Grant and announced that it would be extended to cover the period 17 April to 20 June 2021 (the end of national lockdown restrictions). Medway's allocation for this extension was £213,787. The decision to

allocate this was made using officer delegations as an extension of the existing scheme with the funding being distributed as follows:

- £50,000 to local food/poverty charities;
- £50,000 to Citizens Advice Bureau Medway;
- £100,000 to provide vouchers to FSM eligible children for the May half term;
- £17,000 for administration costs.

2.5. On 21 June 2021 the government announced a second and final extension to the Covid Local support Grant. Medway Council's allocation was £855,149.34 for the period 21 June 2021 to 30 September 2021. On 28 June 2021 using the urgency provisions, the Leader agreed that £600,000 of the allocation would be awarded to the purchasing of a weekly £10 voucher for each of the 10,000 Free School Meals (FSM) eligible children for each of the 6 weeks school holidays in the period of the grant.

2.6. On 30 September 2021, the government announced the Household Support Fund; a new £500 million fund to support children, families and the most vulnerable over winter. Medway's initial funding allocation of £2,262,463 for the period 6 October 2021 to 31 March 2022 inclusive. The distribution of the grant was agreed by the Leader using the urgency provisions on 21 October 2021. The funding was distributed in three elements:

- £670,000 to fund vouchers at £15 per week for the estimated 10,000 FSM eligible children for the school holidays in October, December and February, in line with the provision agreed through the decision made in June 2021 as set out in paragraph 1.4 above;
- £150,000 to be provided in grants to charities providing food, mirroring support provided through the Winter Grant Scheme;
- £70,000 staffing/administration costs;
- The Balance of £1,372,463 to be provided to individuals making claims for support via new online form and officer referral process.

2.7. In December 2021 the government confirmed the operation of the HAF scheme for 2022/23 to make free places at holiday clubs available in the Easter, summer, and Christmas school holidays in 2022 for those eligible for FSM. Medway's allocation was £1,136,560.00.

2.8. In the Spring Statement on 23 March 2022, the Chancellor announced that the Household Support Fund would continue for the first six months of 2022/23 and that the funding was to be doubled to £1 billion. Medway Council's allocation was £2,262,463.11 however the guidance now required at least one third of the allocation to be spent on supporting households with children, one third to support pensioners and up to one third to support other households in need of support. On 26 April 2022 using urgency provisions, the Leader agreed the following:

- £1million for an application-based grant scheme open to all residents (including families with FSM eligible children);
- £750,000 for a scheme to provide grants to pensioners identified using local and DWP provided data;
- £200,000 for grants to local food charities;
- £165,000 to provide FSM for the holidays not covered by the HAF scheme (operating as MedwayGo), the May half term.

To maximise the proportion of the grant distributed, in the final days of September an additional £101,943 was distributed to food charities with this allocation considered by Public Health colleagues to be sufficient to support their operations for the remainder of the financial year.

- 2.9. On 26 May 2022 the government announced that the Household Support Fund would be extended from 1 October 2022 to 31 March 2023. Medway's allocation is £2,262,463.11.
- 2.10. Based on the government's earlier confirmation that the funding would continue beyond 30 September, to ensure Medway's residents have continuous access to financial support, the Chief Operating Officer used the delegations agreed in the previous urgency report to leave the application process live while this decision is taken.
- 2.11. The grant conditions and guidance for the latest HSF allocation do not require that any elements of the funding are ring-fenced to specific cohorts, however the guidance recommends the following:
- Funding should be made available via a public application process (as Medway has had in place since the initial round);
  - Authorities should explore ways to provide support to disabled people in their area recognising the increased costs many face in particular, and must record the total value of grants awarded to disabled people; and
  - Authorities should minimise duplication between this grant and the Holiday Activities and Food scheme (funding MedwayGo).

### 3. Proposal for disbursing the latest grant allocation

- 3.1. The existing grant application scheme has been well subscribed and has successfully distributed the sum ring-fenced to it from the previous HSF allocation, and it is proposed this continue with eligibility criteria and awards to be made as per decision ref 62/2022, with the following amendments:
- The application form is expanded to ask people to confirm whether they are in receipt of disability benefits; and
  - Awards made to those who identify as such being doubled compared to the standard award (i.e., single household from £50 to £100).
- 3.2. As noted at paragraph 2.8 a range of food charities have recently been provided with a further grant from the previous HSF allocation; it is understood the grants to date represent an amount sufficient to support operations to the

end of the financial year and there is a risk of growing dependency on council funds to support their operations moving forward, As such it is not proposed that a further grant be made to food charities at this stage, however this will be kept under review.

- 3.3. There are four weeks of school holidays in the period this allocation covers to the end of the current financial year:
- October half term – most schools have one week 24-28 October 2022, however some schools have two weeks in this break;
  - Christmas break – two weeks 21 December 2022 – 2 January 2023; and
  - February half term – one week 13-17 February 2023.

The MedwayGo scheme (HAF funded support led by Public Health) will operate between 20-30 December 2022 however the number of days of operation has not yet been confirmed.

- 3.4. It is proposed that vouchers be provided to FSM eligible pupils for the holidays when MedwayGo is not in operation; October half term 2022, February half term 2023 and for one week at Christmas, taking account for the fact that MedwayGo will operate for one week only in the holiday. There are currently estimated to be 11,000 FSM eligible pupils in Medway and at £15 per pupil per week, each week of vouchers would cost £165,000, so three weeks of vouchers would cost £495,000. The actual cost would be higher dependent on the number of schools with two weeks in October, however this should leave a balance in excess of £1.5million. It is also proposed that FSM eligible families will be able to access vouchers at the rate of £15 for the week when MedwayGo is operational during the Christmas holidays, should they not be able or choose not to send their child to that provision.

#### 4. Risk management

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk
<b>Expenditure is not recovered through the Grant claim process.</b>	Expenditure made may be on activities that are not within the grant conditions, and therefore the Government does not fund these through the second and third payments.	The proposal has been designed to ensure expenditure is claimable. Arrangements will be in place to record and monitor expenditure and submit claims in due course.

#### 5. Financial implications

- 5.1. Medway's HSF allocation is for the period 1 October 2022 to 31 March 2023 is £2,262,463.11. Expenditure in line with the grant determination and guidance is claimable from the government in arrears up to the allocation, as has been the case for all tranches of this funding. The funding will be added to

the Council's revenue budget under the delegation of the Chief Operating Officer.

## 6. Legal implications

- 6.1. Under the Equality Act 2010, all public authorities must comply with the Public Sector Equality Duty. For the purposes of this grant, you should consider how any support that helps people facing severe financial hardship impacts those with characteristics protected under the Equality Act.

## 7. Recommendations

- 7.1. The Cabinet is asked to agree the proposals set out in section 3 of this report as the Council's approach to delivering the Household Support Fund and to delegate authority to the Chief Operating Officer, in consultation with the Leader and the Portfolio Holder for Business Management, to finalise and implement these proposals.
- 7.2. The Cabinet is asked to agree to delegate authority to the Chief Operating Officer in consultation with the Leader and the Portfolio Holder for Business Management, to make minor amendments to the proposals to enable them to continue to support vulnerable households in Medway, including amending any discretionary eligibility criteria where discussions remain ongoing and where further Government advice is provided.
- 7.3. The Cabinet is asked to agree that recommendations in 7.1 and 7.2 are considered urgent and therefore should not be subject to call in.

## 8. Suggested reasons for decision

- 8.1. Given the lack of cost to the local taxpayer it is appropriate for the Council to introduce these measures to support our most vulnerable residents.

## Lead officer contact

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## Appendices

None

## Background papers

[Household Support Fund Extension Letter](#)  
[Household Support Fund No.3 Grant Determination 2022 notification](#)  
[Household Support Fund: Draft Guidance for County Councils and Unitary Authorities in England \(1 October 2022 to 31 March 2023\)](#)