

## **Cabinet**

**11 March 2025**

### **Household Support Fund 2025/26**

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Vince Maple, Leader of the Council

Report from: Phil Watts, Chief Operating Officer

Author: Gemma Gilley, Head of Benefits and Financial Welfare  
Katey Durkin, Chief Finance Officer

#### **Summary**

This report sets out proposals for the use of the Household Support Fund (HSF) for the period 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026 to ensure the grant is disbursed in full to Medway's residents.

#### **1. Recommendations**

- 1.1. Cabinet is asked to agree the proposals set out in section 5 of this report as the Council's approach to delivering the Household Support Fund in 2025/26 and to delegate authority to the Chief Operating Officer, in consultation with the Leader of the Council, to finalise and implement these proposals.
- 1.2. Cabinet is asked to agree to delegate authority to the Chief Operating Officer, in consultation with the Leader of the Council, to amend the proposals to ensure the Household Support Fund is disbursed in full to benefit Medway's residents:
  - Where amendment is necessary to meet the Government's conditions for the use of the grant set down in guidance published after the date of this decision,
  - Where amendment is necessary to ensure the grant can be disbursed in full, including introducing further proposals to reach eligible residents,
  - Where amendment is necessary to ensure the activity in the proposals can be delivered within the total grant allocated to Medway Council.
- 1.3. Cabinet is asked to agree to delegate authority to the Chief Operating Officer, in consultation with the Leader of the Council, to provide a delivery plan to the Department for Work and Pensions in accordance with the conditions and guidance associated with the Household Support Fund.

## 2. Suggested reasons for decisions

- 2.1. The Household Support Fund (HSF) is fully grant funded by the Department of Work and Pensions to support vulnerable households. The Government have confirmed that the HSF will continue for the 2025/26 financial year but have yet to confirm individual local authority allocations or publish conditions and guidance for the scheme. There have been no indications from the Government that the scheme for 2025/26 will be different than the scheme for 2024/25. Agreeing broadly consistent proposals with those in place for 2024/25 along with delegations to officers to amend, finalise and implement these proposals will enable officers to mobilise the scheme quickly when allocations and conditions are confirmed, and will therefore ensure continuity of support to vulnerable residents in Medway.

## 3. Budget and policy framework

- 3.1. Matters relating to grant funding to support Medway's population are a matter for Cabinet.

## 4. Background

- 4.1. Since November 2020, the government has continued to provide financial support to vulnerable children and families via local authorities, with this being named the HSF from 30 September 2021. Medway Council received £2,262,463 for the six months to the end of the 2021/22 financial year and has continued to receive the same sum for every six month period since though funding announcements have often been made close to the start of the period to which the funding relates.
- 4.2. The Government confirmed the HSF would continue for the 2024/25 financial year in the Autumn Budget published in October 2024, with £742million nationally for the scheme. At the time of preparing this report the Government has yet to confirm individual local authority allocations or publish conditions and guidance for the scheme. The 2025/26 national quantum of funding represents a reduction of £100million compared to 2024/25 allocations, suggesting the individual authority allocations could be reduced by around 12%.
- 4.3. In 2024/25 the fund has been used to provide vouchers to parents and carers of Free School Meal eligible pupils for the school holidays, the continuation and extension of the successful scheme providing grants to residents and covering administrative costs. The council has been able to support 1,537 residents who just miss out on receiving Pension Credit (and who are in receipt of Housing Benefit and/or Council Tax Reduction) with £200 towards energy costs. £200,000 has been passed to our partners within the Medway Food Partnership to enable the provision of food within Medway.

## 5. Proposed Household Support Fund Scheme for Medway

- 5.1. No guidance has been published as yet for the latest extension to cover the 2025/26 financial year; however, this report assumes the guidance will remain unchanged and if required, any amendments will be implemented using the delegations recommended to Cabinet.
- 5.2. Based on the guidance published for the period to the end of March 2025, when administering the fund, authorities are expected to adopt the following principles: use the funding for the specified period to meet immediate needs and help those who are struggling to afford household essentials including energy and water bills, food, and wider essentials. Authorities can also use funding to support households with housing costs where existing housing support does not meet this need, and to supplement support with signposting and advice.
- 5.3. The expectation was that the fund should be used to support households in crisis; not just those in receipt of benefits. The revised guidance highlights assistance for care leavers, carers and disabled people as suggested cohorts, these are cohorts we have previously supported. Targeted support can be carried out using the Low-Income Family Tracker and DWP data shares. Authorities may deliver the scheme through a variety of routes including providing vouchers or cash to households, making direct provision of food and goods, or issuing grants to third parties. Authorities must operate at least part of their schemes on an application basis throughout the duration of the fund, either continuously over the majority or in regular intervals throughout the scheme.
- 5.4. To ensure the fund is distributed with the maximum reach and impact possible, the following is proposed:
- 5.5. **The continuation of support for Free School Meals eligible pupils during the school holidays between 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026:** The numbers of children eligible for free school meals in Medway is rising with the most recent data available showing there are 12,600 eligible children in Medway. Providing every eligible child with £15 in vouchers for every school holiday in the period would cost approximately £2.5million allowing for some growth in caseload. This support would be provided in addition to any offers made by the Holidays and Food Activities Programme (HAF).
- 5.5.1. **The continuation of the successful grant scheme:** The proposed scheme is set out in full at Appendix 1 to this report. It is proposed to hold the award amounts agreed in April 2024. We will continue with the new professionals referral route, through which Medway Council's relevant partners will be invited to refer individuals they are supporting directly into the grant scheme. The grant scheme will be allocated any remaining funds for distribution to households in need. Money allocated to the grant scheme will also be used for targeted support using tools such as the Low-Income Family Tracker to help households who are in need and assisting partner organisations within the Medway Food Partnership with food provision in Medway.

5.5.2. The revised guidance indicated that on average authorities are spending 5% on administration so 5% of any grant would be allocated for this purpose. This will cover staffing, communications, systems and design costs.

5.6. As the grant-based scheme, free school meals allocations and some administration costs are demand led and the amounts allocated to each element of the scheme may change, Cabinet are asked to delegate authority to the Chief Operating Officer in consultation with the Leader and Portfolio Holder to make minor amendments to the scheme to ensure that the grant is fully distributed by 31 March 2026 as required.

## 6. Risk management

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk	Risk rating
<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.	CIV
<b>Likelihood</b>		<b>Impact:</b>	
A Very likely B Likely C Unlikely D Rare		I Catastrophic II Major III Moderate IV Minor	

## 7. Financial implications

7.1. Medway's HSF allocation for 2025/26 has not yet been confirmed. 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.

## 8. Legal implications

8.1. 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.

## Lead officer contact

Gemma Gilley, Head of Benefits and Financial Welfare,  
[gemma.gilley@medway.gov.uk](mailto:gemma.gilley@medway.gov.uk), 01634 332310

Katey Durkin, Chief Finance Officer, [katey.durkin@medway.gov.uk](mailto:katey.durkin@medway.gov.uk) 01634 332355

## Appendices

Appendix 1 – Proposed Grant scheme April 2025 to March 2026

## Background papers

None