



CABINET

DATE: 7 DECEMBER 2021

Household Support Fund

Report of Maureen Taylor Interim Executive Director Communities and Business Development

Cabinet Member: Cllr Richard Wearmouth, Corporate Resources
Cllr Wendy Pattison, Adult Well-being

Purpose of report

The report provides an overview of Northumberland County Council's proposed response and delivery of the Household Support Fund (HSF) for the period 06th October 2021 to 31st March 2022.

Recommendations

- To note the content of the report and the actions to deliver the programme
- To agree Northumberland Communities Together continue to manage the administration and delivery of the HSF through to 31st March 2022
- To approve the Household Support Fund Assistance Policy 2021 to support delivery of the scheme.
- To consider any additional targeted client groups that the Council may wish include in the delivery plan
- To note that NCT will work with staff across the Council directorates and services, town and parish councils to identify potential client groups who may be targeted for specific support

Link to Corporate Plan

This report is relevant to Thriving, Living, Learning and Connecting priorities in the NCC Corporate Plan 2018- 2022

Background

On 30 September 2021 the Government announced that a new Household Support Fund (HSF) grant will be made available to County Councils and Unitary Authorities in England to support those most in need this winter. This new grant will run from 06 October 2021 to 31 March 2022 and totals £500m. The Barnett formula applies in the usual way to the additional £421m funding in England, so devolved administrations will receive up to £79m of the £500m. **Northumberland County Council indicative funding allocation is £2,480,330.00.**

Although the announcement was made during a period of press coverage and communication regarding cessation of Universal Credit Uplift and Furlough the DWP and the treasury department are very clear that scheme is not a substitute for those schemes and should not be used as a form of support to replace these deductions.

Local Authorities are encouraged to 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. As **support is not restricted to vulnerable households in receipt of benefits**, Local Authorities are encouraged to identify vulnerable households through advice and support from other professionals and Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) sector partners.

At least 50% of the total funding must be spent on families with children. In terms of type of support, the expectation is that the Household Support Fund should primarily be used to support households in the most need with food, energy and water bills. The scheme can be used to support provision of FSM payment during non-term time periods under the assistance to household for support with food. 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 such as the Housing Discretionary Payments (DHP) do not meet this exceptional need. Housing support is restricted and does not include provision to cover mortgage payments etc. Further detail and guidance on housing related support is available in the grant guidance document.

Framework Approach

The framework provided for Household Support Fund is similar to the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) framework for the delivery of COVID Winter Support Grant and COVID Local Support Grant.

The following expectations remain the same

- The fund should primarily be used 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.
- Authorities have the ability to deliver the scheme through a variety of routes including providing vouchers to households, making direct provision of food, or issuing grants to third party organisations (TPO)
- 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
- The funding will be paid in arrears following receipt by the DWP of the Statement of Grant Usage incorporated within a fully satisfied and validated management information return

The following changes have been made to the previous schemes:

- The requirement that at least 80% of the total funding will be ring-fenced to support households with children has been reduced to 50%.
- The requirement that only a maximum of up to 20% of the total funding can be used to support other households (i.e. household without a child aged 0-19yrs) has been increased to 50%.
- The requirement that at least 80% of the total funding will be ring-fenced to provide support with food, energy and water bills for household purposes (including drinking, washing, cooking, central heating, and sanitary purposes) and sewerage has been reduced to 50%.
- The requirement that only a maximum of up to 20% of the total funding can be used to provide support with other essentials clearly linked to the scheme conditions (including sanitary products, warm clothing, soap, blankets, boiler service/repair, purchase of equipment including fridges, freezers, ovens, etc.) has been increased to 50%.

The scheme now includes restricted discretion to support housing costs where existing housing support schemes do not meet this exceptional need.

Draft Delivery Plan

All Councils are required to submit a draft delivery plan for approval and monitoring by Government. The table below shows the breakdown of expected spend based on experience of the previous grants.

Northumberland will be supporting those families/households who:

- are in receipt of Free School Meals during the non-term times October 2021, Christmas/New year 2021/22, February 2022 and Easter 2022.
- require welfare support and assistance to access universal Holiday Activity & Food programmes
- experiencing food poverty or insecurities
- include a person aged 19 to 25 with special educational needs and disability (SEND) and/or care leavers requiring support and assistance
- vulnerable residents living in cold homes with poor fuel efficiency ratings

- experiencing financial hardship due to high fuel and/or energy costs
- homeless, sleeping rough or at risk of homelessness.

Area of Funding	Planned Activities	Total
		Anticipated spend (£s)
Support for Food of which is supporting Households without children 0-19yrs...	Continue to support the NCC food Poverty Working Group and Nourish Northumberland Food partnership to address food poverty and insecurities across communities. Direct food provision, emergency food provision, Pay point Payments, Shopping Vouchers sustainable community food offers	700,000
Support for food of which is supporting children eligible for Free School Meals during holidays	Support for families through shopping vouchers, Pay Point Payments, direction to Holiday Activity & Food (HAF) programme where eligible	820,330
Support for food of which is supporting children not currently eligible for FSMs (£s)	Emergency welfare support and assistance to needs and support for universally funded Holiday Activity & Food Programmes	100,000
Support for Energy and Water.	Continue to support the Northumberland Fuel partnership and Warmer Homes partnership to address fuel poverty and insecurities through offer of Fuel Payment Vouchers, Pay Point Payments, and other discretionary support offers such as Greener Homes Grants. Targeted provision to vulnerable households living in cold homes, experiencing fuel poverty.	240,000
Support for Essentials linked to Energy and Water.	Support to households experiencing emergency with heating, electrical appliances such as cookers, boilers etc or other equipment essential for cooking, heating . Payment via Pay Point or through VCS organisations supporting provision of refurbished/recyclable goods	120,000
Support for Wider Essentials (Please specify in planned activities).	Support to households for emergency assistance with warm winter items, cooking utensils, bedding and other essentials - targeted provision for those experiencing homelessness, or experiencing transition due to domestic abuse, leaving prison, care etc and are deemed eligible and vulnerable and have no other means of support. Support to those households who meet HSF scheme eligibility but have no recourse to public funds.	100,000
Support for housing costs (Please specify in planned activities).	Support with housing costs associated with connectivity bills to ensure individuals keep connected addressing social isolation; can process online transactions such as food deliveries, medical appointments, prescriptions, etc. Scheme allows discretion for other emergency housing bills, call out cost's plumber, electrician etc if aligns to scheme criteria.	40,000
Other spend (Please specify in planned activities).	Support with the delivery of prescriptions or other deliveries to help maintain households during periods of practical hardship or isolation. Continue to support the Northumberland Clothing Partnership to help provide and distribute clotting essentials to families in need of support and assistance.	40,000

Scheme Administration.	Administration Charges for Pay Point transactions, Voucher Schemes etc. There is no provision for staff costs Northumberland waives the right to ensure maximum allocations goes to households in need.	20,000
Not allocated yet - held contingency.	Contingency provision to be allocated based on emerging need, targeted analysis and data. FSM costs will potentially exceed the £820,330 provisioned	300,000
Overall.		2,480,330

Eligibility & Access

DWP has allowed flexibility within the scheme to identify which vulnerable households are in most need of support and allows Northumberland County Council to apply their own discretion when identifying eligibility.

Access to the Household Support Fund can be via:

- applications for support or
- proactively identifying households who may benefit,

Northumberland County Council will take a mixture of the two approaches.

There is no requirement for Authorities to undertake a means test or conduct a benefit check unless this specifically forms part of the Authority's local eligibility criteria. In accordance with their general legal duties, Authorities must have a clear rationale or documented policy/framework outlining their approach including how they are defining eligibility and how households access the scheme.

Widespread communication is planned through NCC and NCT channels to ensure maximum awareness and to promote the fund.

NCT have created significant reach in our communities through the success of the previous administration of the Covid Support Grant, Winter Support Grant and Holiday Activity and Food programme.

Access to the fund will be facilitated by NCT via telephone during the following times (with the exception of bank holidays):

- Monday to Friday – 9:00am to 18:00pm

Northumberland Communities Together Tel: 01670 620015
Email: NCT@Northumberland.gov.uk

- Out of Hours & Weekends

Out of hours and weekends are handled by NCC OneCall emergency duty system. An out of hours voicemail service is also available including directing callers to other potential avenues of support. Tel: 01670 536400

Trusted Partners and Referring Organisations

The following organisations have supported Northumberland County Council through their work with Northumberland Communities Together to ensure support is targeted and reaches those most in need of support.

The following is a list of trusted organisations and partners supporting with the delivery of practical support and essentials to support residents who are in need and eligible for welfare support and assistance under the Household Support Fund or previous COVID Local Support Grant. The list is not exclusive or exhaustive but provides an example of the various community groups supporting Northumberland Communities Together:

GLENDAL GATEWAY TRUST (Wooler Foodbank)	HADSTON HOUSE YOUTH & COMMUNITY PROJECTS (HADSTON FOODBANK)	BELL VIEW (BELFORD FOODBANK)	NORTHERN SOUL KITCHEN (BERWICK COMMUNITY KITCHEN)
EAST HARTFORD COMMUNITY FOOD BANK	REAL DEAL PLUS LTD (ASHINGTON FOODBANK)	WEST NORTHUMBERLAND FOOD BANK	ALNWICK DISTRICT FOOD BANK
SEATON DELAVAL AND HOLYWELL COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION COMMUNITY CENTRE (FOOD BANK)	WANSBECK VALLEY FOOD BANK	BERWICK COMMUNITY TRUST (SPITAL FOODBANK)	AMBLE FOOD BANK
BLYTH FOODBANK	BLYTH STAR ENTERPRISES (SOUTHBEACH FOODBANK)	NEW HARTLEY COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION (CRAMLINGTON FOODBANK)	ISABELLA COMMUNITY FOODBANK
MAYFIELD COMMUNITY FOODBANK	THE MATTHEW PROJECT FOOD BANK (BEDLINGTON FOODBANK)	SEATON VALLEY COMMUNITY FOODBANK	EAST BLYTH (FOODBANK)
FRIENDS OF EASTWOODS PARK (PEOPLES KITCHEN)	ENGAGE IN THE COMMUNITY PROJECT (FOODBANK)	CITIZEN ADVICE NORTHUMBERLAND	NORTHUMBERLAND COMMUNITY BLIND ASSOCIATION
ADAPT NORTHEAST	BLYTH COMMUNITY VOLUNTARY ACTION	REAL WOMEN ASHINGTON	FRIENDS OF EASTFIELDS PARK
BERWICK DEVELOPMENT TRUST	WOMENS WORKSHOP	HOPE CENTRE	COMPANY B LONGHOUTON
THE MINERS LAMP COMMUNITY CAFÉ & HUB	CHOPPINGTON TOGETHER COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION	ALZHMERS SOCIETY	SEATON SLUICE MEDICAL PRACTICE
WELL UP NORTH PCN	VALENS MEDICAL GROUP	RAILWAY MEDICAL GROUP	BELL VIEW CENTRE
BEDLINGTON SALVATION ARMY	ASHINGTON SALVATION ARMY	COMMUNITY LADDER SCHEME	BACCMANS
NORTH NORTHUMBERLAND VOLUNTARY FORUM	RURAL US COMMUNITY COORDINATION	NIND & SOUL	LEADING LINKS
AGE CONCERN	NORTHUMBERLAND RECOVERY COLLEGE	FOOD & FRIENDSHIP	FULL CIRCLE

The following is a list of trusted professionals and community partners who have made direct referrals on behalf of vulnerable residents seeking welfare support and assistance under the Household Support Fund or previous COVID Local Support Grant. The list is not exclusive or exhaustive but provides an example of the various referral routes:

Local Councillors / Town & Parish Councils	DWP Case Workers	Food Banks & Food Charities	Northumberland Refugee & Asylum Seeker Team
Members of Parliament	Employability Workers	Revenues & Benefits Officers	Citizen Advice Bureau Northumberland
Health Visitors / Midwives	Early Help Practitioners	Community Centres & Community Hubs	Youth Services/ Community Voluntary Youth Organisations
Children & Young People Social Care Teams	Adult Social Care Teams / Social Workers	Northumberland Schools	Criminal Corrections Service / Probation Service
Housing Associations	Age Concern / Alzheimer's Society / Dementia UK	British Legion / Armed Forces Outreach Services	Northumbria Police
Social Prescribers, GP's – PCN Network	Red Cross/ NHS Responders	Northumberland Adolescent Services	Northumberland Fire & Rescue Service
Mental Health Workers / Northumberland Recovery College	Northumberland Blind Association / Blind Veterans Organisations	Northeast Migration Partnership	National Test & Trace Service

Implications

Policy	This is a government initiative providing support to all Local Authorities for the period to 31 March 2022
Finance and value for money	The draft delivery plan outlines the indicative areas of spend as per the criteria in the national guidance. The Council is required to submit monthly returns to the Department on spend. Funding is paid to the Council in arrears
Legal	There is no requirement for Authorities to undertake a means test or conduct a benefit check unless this specifically forms part of the Authority's local eligibility criteria
Procurement	Not Applicable
Human Resources	NCT staffing resources will administer the grant. A small allowance can be ring fenced from the Fund should that be necessary. This is not expected.
Property	Not applicable
Equalities (Impact Assessment attached) Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> N/A <input type="checkbox"/>	EIA to be completed
Risk Assessment	Not applicable
Crime & Disorder	Potential positive impact on crime and disorder prevention when vulnerable residents feel supported
Customer Consideration	Open access to the Fund will encourage dialogue and provide support from this Fund. Where that is not appropriate, NCT will maximise its networks to find solutions to meet the needs of our vulnerable residents. Customer satisfaction is expected to be good.
Carbon reduction	Not directly applicable. Funding to support fuel insecurities will lead to conversations with residents about green energy supplies
Health and Wellbeing	Supporting vulnerable people to maintain their health and wellbeing over the winter period by providing targeted and personalised support

Wards	All
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Report sign off.

Authors must ensure that officers and members have agreed the content of the report:

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