

Report to Cabinet

13 April 2022

Subject:	Household Support Fund
Cabinet Member:	Councillor Maria Crompton – Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources
Director:	Simone Hines – Director of Finance
Key Decision:	Yes Significant in terms of its effect on communities living or working in an area comprising two or more wards of the Borough.
Contact Officer:	Ian Dunn – Service Manager Revenues and Benefits ian_dunn@sandwell.gov.uk

1 Recommendations

- 1.1 That approval be given to use the Household Support Fund (HSF) to provide financial support to those Sandwell residents who are most in need once the final guidance is received.
- 1.2 That the Director of Finance/Section 151 officer be authorised to approve Sandwell’s Housing Support Fund Scheme in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources
- 1.3 That in the event that there are any further Household Support Schemes introduced by the government, the Director of Finance/Section 151 officer, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources, be authorised to approve Sandwell’s Housing Support Fund Scheme



2 Reasons for Recommendations

- 2.1 The Government announced on the 31st March 2022 that they were providing a further £421m to councils to support those most in need, particularly those including children and pensioners who would otherwise struggle with energy bills, food and water bills.
- 2.2 Sandwell have been allocated funding of £3,471,442, for the period 1st April 2022 to 30th September 2022
- 2.3 Government draft guidance states it will be up to each council to decide how to administer the funding.
- 2.4 However, awards must be based on the following framework:
- at least one third of the total funding will be ring-fenced to support households with children,
 - at least one third of the total funding will be ring fenced to support pensioners
 - with up to one third of the total funding to other households genuinely in need of support. This may include households not currently in receipt of DWP welfare benefits.
- 2.5 In terms of type of support, the expectation is that the HSF should primarily be used to support the households in need with:
- Energy and water
 - Food
 - Essentials linked to energy and water
 - Wider essentials i.e. broadband phone bills, clothing etc.
 - Housing Costs

3 How does this deliver objectives of the Corporate Plan?

	The use of the Household Support fund outlined in this report will allow us to continue to support those most in need this winter.
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4 Context and Key Issues

- 4.1 Given the timeframe involved we are waiting on the final guidance from the government as to how the HSF can be administered.
- 4.2 This is an extension to the HSF that the government allocated Sandwell MBC £3,471,442 for the period 6th October 2021 to 31st March 2022.
- 4.3 The previous HSF allocation did not include the one third of the total funding that needs to be ring fenced to support pensioners and so the previous policy approved by Cabinet in October 2021 will need to be amended to reflect the revised guidance.
- 4.4 The fund will be administered by the Revenues and Benefits Service and any administrative costs incurred can be claimed from the £3.4m.
- 4.5 An HSF policy will be produced and approved by the Director of Finance/Section 151 officer. This will then be publicised on Sandwell's website. The aim is to have the policy and application process available by the end of April.
- 4.6 It is anticipated that the policy will be largely the same as the existing policy in terms of the level of support offered, with the exception of ensuring that 1/3 of the funding allocation is awarded to pensioners. It is also anticipated that a proportion of the funding will be used to support food provision during the school holidays for those eligible for Free School Meals.

5 Alternative Options

- 5.1 The draft Government guidance does state the Household Support Fund may be awarded to households not currently in receipt of DWP welfare benefits.
- 5.2 This approach could be considered when looking at our HSF policy



6 Implications

Resources:	The grants will be paid by Revenues and Benefits staff. There is no impact on any council managed property or land.
Legal and Governance:	Government guidance outlines appropriate use of this funding. This has been detailed in the report.
Risk:	Risk assessments will be undertaken and updated throughout the scheme with an emphasis on managing the risk of fraud. Pre and post payment checks will also be carried out.
Equality:	An equality impact assessment is not required for the proposals in this report.
Health and Wellbeing:	The assistance we provide by way of payments will help our citizens to better manage financially and will in turn aid their personal well-being.
Social Value	See above under 'Health and Wellbeing'.

7. Appendices

None

8. Background Papers

None

