

Household Support Fund

Proposal

October 2021

Background and criteria for Grant

On the 5th October 2021 the government announced that the Household Support Fund will be made available to Local Authorities with the purpose of providing targeted financial support for vulnerable resident over the winter. Croydon has been awarded £3,013,689.49 to be used between 6th October 2021 and 31st March 2022.

At least 50% of the fund must be spent on families with children under 19 or over 19 in receipt of child related benefits. The fund is not restricted to vulnerable households in receipt of benefits.

The primary use of the fund is for food, energy and water bills. However the fund can also be used for the following:

- Essential costs linked to energy and water bills (i.e. sanitary products, warm clothing, soaps, blankets)
- Wider essential costs not linked to energy & water (i.e. bills, clothing, essential transport cost)
- Housing Costs in exceptional cases of genuine emergency. (see guidance for full details)
- Reasonable administrative costs

Enclosed is the draft launch letter, draft grant determination and draft guidance for further details.

Please also be aware that the DWP have only provided the draft documents. Finalised documents will be shared if and when they are provided.

Internal Stakeholders

Collaborative work undertaken with relevant services who can identify the residents that would most benefit from the fund. Conversations have been taking place with these services to identify the needs of residents and how they could use the fund to support their residents through the winter period.

Services that have been identified and finalised:

- Education
- Housing
- Adult services front door
- Children's front door
- Revenues
- Community Grants
- Leaving Care

External stakeholders

There will be engagement with residents, JCP and other 3rd party organisations that work with vulnerable residents to promote the support that will be available over winter.

Grant allocation proposals

Based on the conversations and service demand the below is the proposed allocation.

| Department | Amount | Plan |
|------------------------------|------------|--|
| Education | £1,728,750 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £1,312,500 to be given to schools to fund 5 weeks of £15 food vouchers for families in receipt of Free School Meals (FSM) • £416,250 to provide £75 vouchers for low income families with children 16-19, SEND, Elective home education & Early years. This will be administrated by the Discretionary Support team as discussed with education. |
| Housing | £307,530 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £27,890 to support Croydon Affordable Homes (CAH) vulnerable residents over the winter with food and energy • £25,000 to support vulnerable council tenants with food, essentials linked to food & utilities and wider essentials • £45,168 to provide financial help with residents in Emergency accommodation with fuel and food during benefit change over. • £50,000 to support rough sleepers working with the council with emergency food, and wider essentials to support move on into sustainable accommodation • £12,500 to provide food vouchers to residents moving from emergency accommodation into private rented accommodation • £28,750 to support large families in emergency accommodation with utilities over the winter. • £39,150 to assist vulnerable families at risk of homelessness to move to secure accommodation where other support isn't available. • £69,072 to support families with no recourse with food vouchers • £10,000 to provide emergency food and essentials for residents who present as homeless and have no other means to access them. |
| Discretionary Support Team | £388,492 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £388,492 to the Discretionary Support Team to provide assistance with food, fuel, essentials, wider essentials for residents in the borough. The team will work with residents in receipt of DHP to provide additional support through the fund to help provide financial stability. The team will also support residents referred by 3rd party organisations including JCP, SWLLC, Age UK, FJC, Stepping Change |
| Adult Social Care front door | £52,360 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £52,360 to provide emergency support, essential support, wider essential support for vulnerable adults who approach Adult social care. |

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|-----------------------|-------------------|--|
| Children's front door | £55,988 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> £55,988 to provide emergency support, essential support, wider essential support for vulnerable adults who approach Children's social care. |
| Revenues | £200,000 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> £200,000 to assist vulnerable residents who are struggling with current year Council tax bill. Residents will be identified by the revenues team and an award can be made to help reduce the bill. |
| Care leavers | £89,000 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> £89,000 to replicate the previous process and support Care leavers with £45 food vouchers over the Christmas & February holiday |
| Community Groups | £150,000 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> £100,000 will be provided to community & voluntary sector to set up a grant that community groups can apply for to support hard to reach residents that engage with community groups rather than the council. £50,000 to be given to foodbanks to provide toiletries and nappies over the winter. The CVA has provided a list of all the known foodbanks in Croydon and the Community & Voluntary sector will confirm the foodbanks that have good practice and are able to manage the funds. |
| Admin costs | £41,568 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> £35,568 to cover 2 grade 6 BSO for 6 months. Due to the scope and publicity of this fund there will be additional demand on the Discretionary support team and Education compared to previous funds. As a result additional resource will be required. £6,000 to cover transaction fees incurred when purchasing food, fuel and goods on the Family Fund System |
| Sub-Total | £3,013,688 | |

How the fund is paid

We will be paid in arrears following the below management information (MI) returns being submitted and endorsed by our S151 officer.

- Interim MI return
 - Covering 06 October 2021 - 31 December 2021
 - Deadline: 21 January 2022
- Final MI return
 - Covering 06 October 2021 - 31 March 2022
 - Deadline: 22 April 2022

As payments are in arrears the funds will be required from the council upfront and reimbursed by DWP at a later date. This poses a financial risk to the council if the DWP do not reimburse the funds. Reimbursement is due to the DWP being satisfied with the returned MI and as stated in the guidance payment can be delayed or refused.

Communications

All services receiving grant money have been met with to discuss proposal and plan. Conversations will continue to ensure that the services are ready when the fund is made available.

To ensure that residents are made aware of the Household Support Fund information will be sent to 3rd party organisations that engage with vulnerable residents. This will include but not limited to Job Centre Plus, Age UK, Family Justice Centre and South West London Law Centre. The Croydon Council web pages will be updated with a Household Support Fund webpage with details of the fund and how to apply.

Awareness will also be raised internally with communication being sent out to all front facing service about the fund and how to apply.

Administration and tracking

A cost code has been created for the Household Support Fund (C13803). All spend relating to the fund will be made against the cost centre to enable easier tracking of spend. Work will be done with Finance and monthly meetings will be set up so the cost centre and spend can be monitored, and issues can be highlighted and mitigated quickly.

Service will be responsible for recording and tracking their day to day spend from the fund. This will be to allow monitoring of what the fund is being spent on (DWP return) and how much is left in each areas budget. Work will be done with individual services to establish the best practice for reporting, based on how and what they are awarding. This may include but not limited to; getting reports being created or using existing systems that are already in place.

Although all services will be responsible for tracking their own spend, they will need to supply monthly spend reports to the Single Point of Contact (SPOC). The SPOC will be responsible for over-seeing and monitoring the fund and it's spend as well as completing and returning MI.

To help mitigate the risk of underspend the monitoring process will also identify underspending in services that can be used and other areas.

Recommendation

Recommendation will be that we proceed with allocating the funds as mentioned above. A robust monitoring process will be emplaced to monitor and ensure maximum benefits to the residents and no financial risk to the council. The monitoring process will be developed and worked on with services to ensure that the correct information is being captured and reported.