



# HARTLEPOOL BOROUGH COUNCIL

## OFFICER DECISION RECORD

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| Department:  | Childrens and Joint Commissioning Services   |
| Division:  |  |
| Date of Decision / Issue<br>of Licence:                              | 29/04/2025   |
| Officer Making Decision:   | MS S ROBINSON  |
| Subject / Description &<br>Reason for Decision:<br>(for publication) | Allocation of the Household Support Fund for 2025/26.<br>Funding allocation was announced on 04 March 2025 with the allocation of the fund to commence from 01/04/2025. Decision required to allocate funding and commence commitments of the fund ahead of consideration of a report at first Finance and Policy Committee of the new municipal year. |
| Type of Decision:  | Key<br><b>Forward Plan entry number:</b> CJCS 166/25   |
| Nature of Delegation<br>Being Exercised:                             | Decision to allow for timely commitment of grant to be undertaken by Director of Children's and Joint Commissioning Services in consultation with the Leader   |
| Alternative Options<br>Considered & Rejected:                        | Report for decision presented to Finance and Policy Committee for decision. Late announcement of the grant meant there was insufficient time for report to be taken to committee before spend commitments needed to commence.  |
| Any Declared Register of<br>Interest:                                | No   |

### OFFICER WITH THE DELEGATION

**NAME:** MS S ROBINSON  
**POSITION:**

### IN CONSULTATION WITH...

**NAME:** Brenda Harrison  
**POSITION:** Councillor

**NAME:** DENISE MCGUCKIN  
**POSITION:** Managing Director

# FINANCE AND POLICY COMMITTEE

## DATE



**Subject:** HOUSEHOLD SUPPORT FUND 7 2025/26

**Report of:** Executive Director, Children's and Joint Commissioning Services

**Decision Type:** Key decision tests (1) and (2) apply. Forward plan entry CJCS 166/25

### 1. COUNCIL PLAN PRIORITY

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| <b>Hartlepool will be a place:</b>   |
| - where people are enabled to live healthy, independent and prosperous lives.                    |
| - where those who are vulnerable will be safe and protected from harm.                           |
| - of resilient and resourceful communities with opportunities for all.                           |
| - with a Council that is ambitious, fit for purpose and reflects the diversity of its community. |

### 2. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 2.1 To present to Finance and Policy Committee information on the delivery of phase six of the government's Household Support Fund (HSF) and seek approval for proposals for delivery of a phase seven scheme to support those in greatest need of assistance throughout 2025/26

### 3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Since the 30 September 2021 the Government has made available a Household Support Fund targeting vulnerable households to help them with food and essentials items during financial hardship. Guidelines have varied on schemes with changes of focus from children (phase one) to children and pensioners (phase two), to children, pensioners and those unable to source help from elsewhere (phase three and beyond).

### 3.3 The latest HSF 2025/26 guidance document advises:

*The primary objective of The Fund is to provide crisis support to vulnerable households in the most need with the cost of essentials. The secondary objective is to provide preventative support to prevent vulnerable households from falling into – or falling further into – crisis. Authorities are expected to offer support throughout the duration of The Fund Period and must develop delivery plans to reflect this.*

*Rather than focus on one specific vulnerable group, Authorities should use the wide range of data and sources of information at their disposal, including through engagement with relevant TPOs, to identify and provide support to a broad cross section of vulnerable households to prevent escalation of problems. It is important to stress that The Fund is intended to cover a wide range of low-income households in need, including families with children of all ages, pensioners, unpaid carers, care leavers and disabled people, larger families, single-person households, and those struggling with one-off financial shocks or unforeseen events.*

### 3.4 Eligible spend includes:

#### Crisis support:

- Essentials including energy, water and food support;
- Wider essentials including support with bills clothing, period and hygiene products, essential transport-related costs;
- One off payments to prevent a crisis for example, insulation or energy efficient household items which reduce bills, the purchase of equipment such as fridges, freezers, ovens, slow cookers etc; and
- Housing costs (excluding mortgage support)

#### Preventative support:

- Funding activities which prevent vulnerable households from falling into – or falling further into – crisis. This could include specific support to individual residents or wider support within the broader community;
- Advice services to provide supplementary advice including debt, benefit and or employment advice;
- Any support with the aim of providing longer-term and sustainable solutions. This could include, but is not limited to:
  - assistance with and/or access to affordable food such as subsidised food pantries and community kitchens;
  - provision of cooking lessons with an emphasis on cost-effective methods.

### 3.5 In accordance with the guidance, authorities can deliver the scheme through a variety of routes, including:

- Proactive support by identifying households in need;
- Application-based support where individuals approach the Authority for support; and
- Issuing grants to Third Party Organisations (TPOs) to provide support on behalf of the Authority.

As part of their offer, every Authority must operate at least part of their scheme on an 'application' basis providing people with the opportunity to come forward to ask for support.

- 3.6 On 04<sup>th</sup> March 2025 the Council received formal notification of the arrangements for the administration of the latest HSF including final guidance and grant determination. HBC has been awarded with £1,750,170.48 for a 12 months period. this reflects a 12% reduction in the award when compared with previous years (£1,986,042.50).
- 3.7 Between October 2024 and March 2025, HBC delivered HSF6 across Hartlepool and the below table outlines the available funding, allocation streams and the estimated reach.

| Support stream  | Value           | Estimated number of awards |
|---|-----------------|----------------------------|
| Shopping vouchers for children in low income families (including free school meals) | £447,020        | 7542                       |
| Pensioners on a low income (LCTS)   | £259,020        | 4450                       |
| Food and bills via third party organisations  | £114,000        | 1568                       |
| Welfare support via application   | £107,170        | 437                        |
| Housing   | 12,000          | 15                         |
| <b>Total</b>  | <b>£939,210</b> | <b>14,012</b>              |

#### 4. PROPOSALS/OPTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

(include here recommended option as well as and alternative options/proposals considered and rejected)

##### 4.1 The latest data tells us that:

- 39% of our children live in poverty including approximately 5,600 entitled to Free School Meals for financial reasons. If we extend this to include 2 year olds through to up to 19 year olds in education or training this increases to approximately 8,000 children and young people;
- approximately 13,500 households benefit from the Local Council Tax Support Scheme (LCTS), an indicator of low income;
- Approximately 11,000 households are in receipt of Universal Credit which includes those who are working but on a low income and are therefore in need of support.

- 4.2 The methods chosen to deliver the previous HSF schemes in Hartlepool have proven effective in reaching vulnerable households through the provision of both crisis and preventative support. The support provided by Third Party Organisations (TPO) has been essential in helping the local authority in its delivery approach and reach.
- 4.3 Officers have met to explore the available options to maximise the impact of HSF7 to support vulnerable households in Hartlepool in accordance with the grant conditions. This has included considering what support can be delivered through Local Council Tax Support, food vouchers, support through voluntary and community sector organisations and the welfare support team.
- 4.4 It should be noted that the administration of such a large grant creates pressure on the capacity and workload of the local authority and the third party organisations that deliver on the Council's behalf. It is essential that, in accordance with the guidance, 5% of the grant is used to support delivery of the scheme by the council and TPOs.
- 4.5 Third Party Organisations have proved crucial in supporting the delivery of previous HSF grant schemes. Expressions of interest were therefore sought in March and April 2025 from organisations who may wish to deliver aspects of the HSF in conjunction with the local authority. The following providers were identified as potential delivery partners with the capacity, resilience and infrastructure required to meet the DWP's HSF compliance requirements:
- Hartlepool Foodbank – food parcels;
  - Citizens Advice – energy and fuel top ups and payments;
  - Advice @ Hart – energy and fuel top ups / energy saving devices; and
  - West View Advice and Resource Centre – household essentials linked to energy.
- 4.6 Based on previous grant delivery experience, the latest Terms and Conditions of the grant and the 12% reduction in the overall grant, it is proposed that the grant for 2025/26 is distributed by the following means:

| Organisation/Scheme   | Allocation - | Rationale   |
|---|--------------|---|
| Support for families with dependent children aged up to 19 years (in education or training) | £742,700     | To provide food vouchers over the 12 month grant period to the value of £100 to all children eligible for free school meals (financially vulnerable) aged 2 - 19. |
| Support for pensioners in receipt of benefit (LCTS)   | £440,800     | To provide payments or food vouchers £100 to  |

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|  |            | pensioners in receipt of LCTS.  |
| HSF application fund (delivered by the Welfare Support team) – aimed at those who can evidence they are struggling but unable to access other forms of support. This would help those above the Free School Meal threshold and those that are working but on a low income. | £226,000   | The Welfare Support Team receive and make awards with regard to applications for energy, food, household essentials and goods. These awards will be made based on personal circumstances and are not means tested. <i>An application process would apply.</i>   |
| HSF application fund (delivered by the Housing Advice Team) for help with exceptional housing costs not already covered by other funding streams. This would help those on benefits and those working but on a low income.   | £20,661.96 | The Housing Advice Team would take applications from residents struggling with exceptional housing costs. This may include help to move to a more affordable property, help with rent arrears or an unexpected dip in income that has caused financial stress. <i>An application process would apply.</i> |
| Hartlepool Food Bank   | £40,000    | Food parcels/bags of shopping to be distributed to advice agencies in town as part of value added services. The grant would be used to buy food rather than use foodbank public donations.  |
| Citizen's Advice Bureau  | £90,000    | To provide fuel vouchers and help paying energy bills; to provide energy household essentials. Both organisations are able to access fuel bank vouchers that can be used for pre paid meter top ups and / or can help those on direct debits or   |
| Advice at Hart   | £90,000    |   |

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|   |  | monthly bills. <i>An application process would apply with evidence of need required before support is provided.</i>  |
| West View Advice and Resource Centre          | £10,000  | To provide household essentials that make cost of living more affordable. This would be in conjunction with their existing HBC commissioned debt and money advice service. |
| Contribution to Hartlepool Food Offer leaflet | £500   | Production of leaflet with advice on services providing low cost and free food distributed across public venues  |
| Poverty Truth Commission                      | £2,000   | Contribution towards the work of the Commission on behalf of those Hartlepool community  |
| HBC and TPO Grant administration              | £87,508.52   | To cover the costs of the staffing, administration, printing, postage etc. associated with delivering the scheme for both HBC and Third Party Organisations.               |
| <b>Total</b>                                  | <b>Anticipated grant and spend -<br/>£1,750,170.48</b> |  |

#### 4.7 Using this method of delivery this would mean that –

- 22% of the grant would be accessed via an application process where anyone struggling with the cost of living can apply
- 73% would be allocated to households in receipt of benefits and on a low income
- 5% of the grant would be used for administration and compliance of the fund including administration payments to voluntary and community sector organisations supporting the delivery of the grant.

- 4.8 Should it become clear that individual strands of support outlined in 4.6 above are not being fully utilised, it is proposed to give delegation to the Executive Director, in conjunction with the chair of Finance and Policy Committee, to amend funding pots so as to ensure full utilisation of grant within the time period.

## 5. OTHER CONSIDERATIONS/IMPLICATIONS

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| <b>RISK IMPLICATIONS</b>                     | The Council is being asked to administer a Government grant for local people based on local need. Public expectations that the grant can fully alleviate the current cost of living crisis must be carefully managed. In addition administration of such a grant creates risk for the Council in that officers have to mobilise resources quickly to develop the local scheme, eligibility criteria and implementation plan. There is a reputational risk to the Council if the scheme is not delivered effectively and efficiently and does not reach those most in need of support. |
| <b>FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS</b>              | <p>The Council is being asked to administer the Household Support Fund Grant, valued at £1,750,170.48 for the period April 2025 to March 2026.</p> <p>The conditions of grant allows for reasonable administrative costs, to be claimed against the grant. Proposals outlined in the report, ensure the Council and its partners limit administrative costs to no more than 5% of the total grant allocation.</p>   |
| <b>LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS</b>                  | The proposals outlined reflect the draft Terms and Conditions of the grant.   |
| <b>CHILD AND FAMILY POVERTY</b>              | A Child and Family Poverty impact assessment has been completed and is attached at <b>Appendix 1</b> to this report.  |
| <b>EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY CONSIDERATIONS</b> | The proposals outlined in this report are targeted to support those in greatest need of financial assistance. The scheme will be administered based on need and inclusive of all those with protected characteristics. It will reach those in receipt of benefits and those that are working but on a low income.   |
| <b>STAFF CONSIDERATIONS</b>                  | It will be necessary for officers from HBC to implement and deliver the proposals outlined in this report on top of their current duties and responsibilities and it may be necessary for HBC to employ additional staff on a temporary basis to ensure the scheme is administered effectively.   |



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| <b>CONSULTATION</b> | <p>Feedback from previous beneficiaries of the scheme tells us that shopping vouchers and energy top ups are very effective and that this should continue as the main focus of the grant.</p> <p>In preparing this report an expression of interest exercise was completed with TPOs to partner with the local authority to deliver the HSF in Hartlepool.</p> |
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## 6. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 6.1 To consider and approve the proposals for delivery of 2025/26 Household Support Fund.
- 6.2 To approve delegation to the Executive Director in consultation with the Chair of Finance and Policy Committee, to amend funding pots so as to ensure full utilisation of grant within the time period.

## 7. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 7.1 The Household Support Fund is a significant grant that is being provided to Hartlepool Borough Council to support local residents and mitigate some of the impact of financial hardship. Finance and Policy Committee has responsibility to agree the arrangements for the provision of assistance to local residents

## 8. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 8.1 Department for Work and Pensions: Household Support Fund: Guidance for County Councils and Unitary Authorities in England (1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026)

## 9. CONTACT OFFICERS

Sally Robinson  
 Executive Director, Children and Joint Commissioning Services  
[Sally.robinson@hartlepool.gov.uk](mailto:Sally.robinson@hartlepool.gov.uk)  
 01429 523910

James Magog  
 Director of Finance, IT and Digital  
[James.magog@hartlepool.gov.uk](mailto:James.magog@hartlepool.gov.uk)  
 01429 523093

Sign Off:-

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|--------------------------------------|-------|
| Managing Director                    | Date: |
| Director of Finance, IT and Digital  | Date: |
| Director of Legal, Governance and HR | Date: |