

**TITLE OF REPORT:** Household Support Fund Round 4 2023/24

**REPORT OF:** Colin Huntington, Strategic Director, Housing,  
Environment and Healthy Communities

---

### **Purpose of the Report**

1. To seek Cabinet's approval of the Council's proposal for the distribution of the Household Support Fund Round 4 (HSF) for the period 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024.

### **Background**

2. The Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) Household Support Fund has been extended until 31 March 2024, providing £3,673,260 of funding. The spirit of the fund remains the same, namely, to support those at risk of going cold or hungry and to help with significantly rising living costs.
3. Whilst previous rounds of funding have been provided for period of 6 months, this round of HSF is to cover the full year 1 April 2023 – 31 March 2024.
4. The expectation is that the HSF should be used to support households in the most need and in particular those who may not be eligible for the other support the government is making available but who are nevertheless in need and who require crisis support. This may include but is not limited to:
  - people who are entitled to, but not claiming, qualifying benefits,
  - people who are claiming Housing Benefit only,
  - people who begin a claim or return to payment of a benefit after the relevant qualifying date.
5. There may, however, be groups who are vulnerable to rising prices even though they are supported through these schemes, for example large families or single-income families. 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 people with disabilities.
6. Energy bills may be of particular concern to low-income households during the period of the fund and Local Authorities should prioritise supporting households with the cost of energy. Support particularly encouraged can include insulation of hot water tanks, fitting draft excluders to a door, or replacing inefficient lightbulbs or white goods. The HSF can also be used to support households with the cost of food and water bills, essential costs related to energy, food and water, 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 do not meet this need.

7. We are asked to consider providing support to people with disabilities who may be facing acute challenges due to the disproportionate impact of rising costs and those people with caring responsibilities due to the challenges in fulfilling their caring role, for example additional heating, water or transport costs.
8. New guidance for round 4 of the HSF scheme has to be followed and includes the requirement that every area must operate at least part of their scheme on an application basis i.e. residents should have the opportunity to come forward to ask for support. There is flexibility on exactly how this can be run, including being continuous, at intervals and/or through third parties rather than directly by the Local Authority
9. Support is required to be available for the duration of the Fund Period.

### **Proposal**

10. Based on the revised guidance from the DWP and the lessons learned from implementing previous rounds of the HSF the following is proposed.

#### **Children**

11. It is proposed Gateshead continues to support children through the free school meals provision. This will require an estimated £1,300,000 to cover the summer break, three half terms (May, October and February) and the Christmas break.
12. It is also proposed to provide an additional payment to each household with children in receipt of Free School Meals at Christmas at a cost of £150,000.
13. Further the proposal would be to allocate £50,000 grant to the Jewish Community Council of Gateshead (JCC) to support children in Jewish schools who do not access free school meals.

#### **Support to households through existing and new projects**

14. There will be support to various groups throughout the year and following an evaluation of the effectiveness of previous rounds of funding in meeting the aims of the fund.
15. These groups include but are not limited to:
  - Food Co-ops
  - Gateshead Foodbank
  - Feeding families
  - Supply of baby milk
  - Running costs for Warm Spaces provision
  - refreshments in Council Warm Spaces
  - Warm Box project
  - Food Network Grant Programme
  - Reconnection of energy and energy grants
  - Citizens Advice, Gateshead

16. It is proposed to set aside an amount of £500,000 to support these groups during the year.

### **Remaining funding subject to administration costs**

17. The new guidance states that every area must operate at least part of their scheme on an application basis i.e. residents should have the opportunity to come forward to ask for support. There is flexibility on exactly how this can be run, including through third parties rather than directly by the Local Authority however the scheme must operate this either continuously or at intervals during the year.
18. An application process will be put in place in the Council with allocations on the basis of the following principles:
- The allocation is based on principles in the current Council's Local Discretionary payments scheme.
  - The application process will operate at intervals when other DWP support is not available.
  - The application process is developed by the Council based on set criteria to help target those residents highlighted in paragraph 4 and 5 of the report.
  - Awards are based on need and are between £50 - £250 unless there is an exceptional case
  - A more holistic support package in conjunction with Citizens Advice Gateshead is offered and provided where necessary
  - Payments are made on a first come, first served basis based on the funding remaining
  - Payments where possible will be made by either the existing voucher system, direct award of goods and services, through Post Office payments or through partner organisations
  - The scheme to be promoted through the website, existing Council Communication channels and the voluntary and community sector

### **Recommendations**

19. It is recommended that Cabinet approves the proposals for the distribution of the Household Support Fund Round 4 (HSF), for the period 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024, as set out in paragraphs 11 to 18 above.

For the following reasons:

- (i) Targeting the groups identified will meet our Thrive policy objectives
- (ii) To support residents at risk of going cold or hungry through the mechanisms above.

---

#### **CONTACT:**

**Alison Dunn**

extension: 2710

**Marisa Jobling**

extension: 3581

## APPENDIX 1

### Policy Context

1. Gateshead residents like many throughout the United Kingdom continue to experience significant cost of living rises, including increases in fuel, interest rates and escalating energy costs.
2. The driver for this work is the Thrive Policy Framework, in particular: -
  - Put people and families at the heart of everything we do
  - Tackle inequality so people have a fair chance
  - Support our communities to support themselves and each other
3. These proposals have regard to the Health and Wellbeing Strategy for Gateshead and the principle of targeting those in greatest need.

### Background

4. The Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) Household Support Fund has been extended until 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024, providing £3,673,260 of funding for the full year. The spirit of the fund remains the same, namely, to support those at risk of going cold or hungry.
5. Energy bills may be of particular concern to low-income households during the period of the fund and Local Authorities should prioritise supporting households with the cost of energy. Support particularly encouraged can include insulation of hot water tanks, fitting draft excluders to a door, or replacing inefficient lightbulbs or white goods. The HSF can also be used to support households with the cost of food and water bills, essential costs related to energy, food and water, 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 do not meet exceptional circumstances

### What's different this time?

6. The expectation is that the HSF should be used to support households in the most need and in particular those who may not be eligible for the other support government has recently made available. This may include but is not limited to:
  - people who are entitled to, but not claiming, qualifying benefits,
  - people who are claiming Housing Benefit only,
  - people who begin a claim or return to payment of a benefit after the relevant qualifying date
7. There may, however, be groups who are vulnerable to rising prices even though they are supported through these schemes, for example large families or single-income families. 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 people with disabilities.
8. New guidance for round 4 of the HSF scheme has to be followed and includes the requirement that every area must operate at least part of their scheme on an

application basis to ensure there is a route for emergency support i.e. residents should have the opportunity to come forward to ask for support. There is flexibility on exactly how this can be run, including through third parties rather than directly by the Local Authority. The Local Authority are expected to operate such a scheme for the majority of the fund period either continuously or in regular intervals over the course of the scheme.

### **Consultation**

16. The Leader and Deputy Leader of the Council have been consulted on this report.

### **Alternative Options**

17. In previous rounds we have relied partly, although not exclusively, on Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) partners to distribute the funds on our behalf, but the demand for service placed an intolerable pressure on VCSE agencies and visibility of potential duplication was much restricted. If we were to take this approach again, we would need to resource the VCSE agencies – on previous occasions they worked within their existing resources. However, in smaller agencies it is likely recruitment to short term employment opportunities may be problematic in the current job market, whereas the Council is more likely to be able to resource the work from its much bigger workforce. The administration costs are also limited by the guidance, significantly reducing the possibility to properly fund other organisations.
18. We have used our learning from previous rounds to formulate these proposals. Further, enquiries with neighbouring authorities and our participation in national networking calls suggest our approach is similar to others.

### **Implications of Recommended Option**

19. **Resources:**

- a) **Financial Implications** – The Strategic Director, Resources and Digital confirms all grant money must be spent, not just allocated, by the end of March 2024. Any underspend must be returned to national government, there is no provision for roll over to future programme activity.
- b) **Human Resources Implications** – We will need to identify and deploy employees to support this work within the administration fee of 5%.
- c) **Property Implications** - None identified.

20. **Risk Management Implication** - Monitoring of spend is essential to ensure all funds are distributed in a timely fashion to Gateshead residents. Any under-spend needs to be returned to national government.

21. **Equality and Diversity Implications** -

Using our network of partners and professional advisers within the Council, the intention is to identify people who may be vulnerable or just coping using a direct

referral system. However, there will be people within these groups who may not be visible to us.

22. **Crime and Disorder Implications** – None identified
23. **Health Implications** – There are health implications for a vulnerable person living in a cold home, it increases their chance of serious illness or death. They are at higher risk of a heart attack or stroke, breathing problems, flu, depression and falls<sup>1</sup>. Further, research has found that food insecurity is associated with increased risk of some birth defects, anaemia, lower nutrient intakes, cognitive problems, and aggression and anxiety<sup>2</sup>.
24. **Climate Emergency and Sustainability Implications** - 9 in 10 households rely on gas boilers and lots of gas boilers need lots of gas; UK households consume more of it than almost all their European peers, at around twice the EU average. Gas burned in households now equates to half of all imports – that is why any spike in gas prices immediately translates into higher heating bills for the UK.  
  
Adequately insulating homes is a key component of managing energy prices. Yet, the charity National Energy Action has noted that between 2012 and 2019 the number of home insulation installations dropped by 95%, and at current rates it would take nearly a century to properly insulate all the current fuel-poor homes in the country.
25. **Human Rights Implications** - None identified
26. **Ward Implications** - None identified

---

<sup>1</sup> National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, Helping to Prevent Winter Deaths and Illnesses Associated with Cold Homes

<sup>2</sup> Health Affairs, Food Insecurity and Health Outcomes