

Bath & North East Somerset Council

MEETING/ DECISION MAKER:	Cllr Richard Samuel, Cabinet Member for Economic Development and Resources	
MEETING/ DECISION DATE:	18th November 2021	EXECUTIVE FORWARD PLAN REFERENCE:
		E 3325
TITLE:	Household Support Fund	
WARD:	All	
AN OPEN PUBLIC ITEM		
List of attachments to this report: Household Support Fund Policy, DRAFT Guidance – Household Support Fund		

THE ISSUE

A decision is required on how the council should use DWP grant funding to support vulnerable households this winter.

1 RECOMMENDATION

The Cabinet Member is asked to confirm that the funding will be used to provide food vouchers to households whose children receive income-related free school meals for the remaining half term periods in the 2021 financial year, and to provide support for energy costs to low-income households in Bath and North east Somerset during the winter period.

2 THE REPORT

2.1 The council has been allocated £967,000 in funding to help vulnerable households with living costs between October 2021 and March 2022. The grant conditions are that at least 50% of the funding must be spent on households with children, and that the following living costs are in scope.

- Energy Costs
- Costs associated with Energy
- Food

- Costs associated with Food
- Housing Costs (excluding Mortgage costs and only in exceptional circumstances where no other support mechanisms apply).

2.2 Residents of Bath and North East Somerset are fortunate that the council provides a good level of support through Local Welfare Provision; a recent survey carried out by the End Furniture Poverty campaign placed the council 10th nationally in Local Welfare Provision investment. The area is also fortunate to have a good network of foodbanks and food clubs, as well as a large Municipal Charity, St Johns Foundation to support residents in crisis.

2.3 The cost of energy has risen sharply over the last year due to worldwide energy supply issues. Whilst there is good provision for support with food and housing costs for B&NES residents, support for help with energy is less available. The council should therefore focus support delivery on this area of need through providing prepaid debit cards to residents to help with energy costs.

2.4 The council has successfully delivered food vouchers for children during half term periods over the last 10 months, supporting over 2000 households with almost £1M of vouchers. It is vital that residents have enough money to feed their children and so this scheme should continue whilst funding is available. Provision of vouchers for children who receive income-related free school meals will also contribute to the council meeting the grant condition of using at least 50% of the funding for households with children.

3 STATUTORY CONSIDERATIONS

3.1 This support constitutes Local Welfare Provision as defined in The Social Security (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2013.

4 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (FINANCE, PROPERTY, PEOPLE)

4.1 The cost of providing Free School Meal vouchers to residents for the remainder of the financial year will be £320,000. This would leave £647,000 of remaining funding.

4.2 This would be sufficient to provide grants of £250 to 2,000 households this winter.

4.3 Grants would be provided using prepaid debit cards, which would incur Administration costs of around £27,000 over the duration of the scheme. Additional staffing costs have been calculated at £7,000.

4.4 A further contribution of £100,000 would be given to Citizens Advice Bath and North East Somerset to help residents with energy costs, including those with key meters.

Free School Meal Vouchers	£320,000
Prepaid debit cards	£500,000
Contribution to Citizens Advice Fuel Voucher scheme	£100,000
Card costs	£27,000
Administration	£7,000

Total	£954,000
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Any underspend will enable the council to provide more cards or cover unforeseen administration costs. Once the funding is exhausted the council will not make any further awards. The policy document attached lists some basic rules of entitlement to prepaid debit cards under this scheme.

5 RISK MANAGEMENT

A risk assessment related to the issue and recommendations has been undertaken, in compliance with the Council's decision-making risk management guidance. The use of prepaid debit cards as opposed to making direct payments to residents is proposed to reduce the risk of fraud and abuse

6 EQUALITIES

An EIA has not been carried out. The scheme is available to all B&NES households on low income who are having difficulty with energy costs.

7 CLIMATE CHANGE

Access to the scheme will be via a web-form on the council's website, which will mean that residents will not have to attend council offices to apply for or receive support.

8 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

None

9 CONSULTATION

S151 Officer, Monitoring Officer, Director of Childrens Services

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Background papers	
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