
Council

15 October 2024

Name of Cabinet Member:

N/A

Director Approving Submission of the report:

Chief Executive

Ward(s) affected:

City wide

Title:

Acceptance of Grant Funding - Household Support Fund Phase 6

Is this a key decision?

N/A

Executive Summary:

This report informs Council of a decision undertaken by the Chief Executive and the Director of Finance and Resources (Section 151 Officer) in accordance with the Financial Procedure Rules as set out in the Constitution and following consultation with the Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities, the Cabinet Member for Strategic Finance and Resources and the Leader of the Council to accept and allocate a grant of £3,224,222.30 from the Department for Work and Pensions (“DWP”) pursuant to the grant scheme known as the Household Support Fund (HSF). Due to the timescales involved, this decision is reported to Council retrospectively.

List of Appendices included:

None

Background papers:

Other useful documents - None

Has it been or will it be considered by Scrutiny?

No

Has it been or will it be considered by any other Council Committee, Advisory Panel or other body?

No

Will this report go to Council? - Yes – 15 October 2024

Report title: Acceptance of Grant Finding - Household Support Fund

1. Context (or background)

- 1.1 The HSF is a funding stream provided to all Local Authorities (LAs) by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) for the purposes of providing local crisis support to vulnerable households in most need with the cost of essentials. Coventry has been delivering this support utilising this fund and its predecessor grants since December 2020 as the fund has evolved from supporting financially vulnerable households impacted by the pandemic to now those impacted by the cost-of-living crisis.
- 1.2 On 2nd September 2024 the Government announced that there would be a new phase of the Household Support Fund for a period of six months (October 2024 to March 2025). Grant guidance and confirmation of allocations was received under embargo on 25th September 2024 with the embargo being lifted on Friday 27th September 2024.
- 1.3 The HSF6 guidance broadly mirrors the previous round however, includes an additional element of eligible spend around preventative activities to prevent poverty locally. It also states that this is not mandatory activity, and they expect the fund to primarily provide crisis support to those most in need and would not expect a large portion of funding to be spent on preventative support.
- 1.4 Given the very tight timescales available to design and implement a new scheme, and given reduced team capacity due to being unable to retain staff with continued late announcements in funding, the planned focus of the delivery for HSF Phase 6, is broadly expected to be in line with HSF Phase 5 but reflecting a potential greater call on energy support during the Winter months.
- 1.5 Similar to previous rounds, spend will need to be closely monitored with schemes adjusted accordingly to ensure it remains within the funding envelope. In line with HSF5 the areas of spend expected to be funded through HSF6 are:
 - Fuel Support
 - Food Support
 - White Goods
 - Clothing
 - Essentials
 - Toiletries
 - Housing costs (where not covered by other Council Housing Duties)
 - Affordable warmth schemes
 - Scheme Administration costs
- 1.6 Due to the value of the HSF Phase 6 grant being in the sum of £3.2m the constitutional requirements for acceptance of the grant are as follows:

Over £2,500,000 ~ to Council, if time permits; if no time to go to Council, joint approval in writing by the Chief Executive and the Director of Finance and Resources (Section 151 Officer) following consultation with the relevant Cabinet Member and Leader to be reported to Council retrospectively

- 1.7 The grant award documentation and scheme guidance were not released until week commencing 23rd September 2024 with commencement date expected on 1st October 2024. The next meeting of Council does not take place until 15th October 2024.
- 1.8 The Council is keen to ensure that we utilise the grant funding for the provision of crisis support for the full 6 month period.
- 1.9 Therefore on 1st October, 2024 , the Chief Executive and Director of Finance and Resources (Section 151 Officer) Officer, following consultation with the Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities, the Cabinet Member for Strategic Finance and Resources and the Leader, approved the acceptance and allocation of a grant of £3,224,222.30 from the Department Work and Pensions (“DWP”) pursuant to the grant scheme known as the Household Support Fund (HSF) in accordance with the Constitution.
- 1.10 On the basis set out above, a briefing note was prepared and this note seeks the approval of the recommendations set out below which is in line with the requirements of the Council’s Constitution where time does not permit for a report to be presented to Council.
- 1.11 The decisions taken in full are:
- a) Approve acceptance of the HSF Phase 6 grant in the sum of £3,224,222.30;
 - b) Approve delivery of the proposed HSF Phase 6 schemes which are to be in line with the use of the HSF Phase 5 grant funding;
 - c) Delegate authority to the Director of Finance (Section 151 Officer), following consultation with the Cabinet Member for Strategic Finance and Resources and the Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities, to:
 - (i) approve acceptance of further grant monies awarded to the Council by the DWP under further HSF schemes in subsequent years, and
 - (ii) take such ancillary or incidental actions required to bring into effect the recommendations set out in this note;
- 1.12. In accordance with the Constitution, this matter is now reported to Council.
- 1.13 Appropriate, further reports on matters arising from this decision will be considered by the relevant Council body as necessary.

2 Options considered

- 2.1 The Chief Executive and the Director of Finance and Resources (Section 151 Officer), following consultation with the Cabinet Member for Communities and Housing, the Cabinet Member for Strategic Finance and Resources and the Leader, agreed that the decision to accept the grant could not wait until the next Council meeting and was critical to the Council’s ability to deliver the Household Support Fund scheme.

3 Results of consultation undertaken

3.1 In accordance with the Constitution, the Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities, the Cabinet Member for Strategic Finance and Resources and the Leader were consulted and they confirmed the course of action.

4 Timetable for implementing this decision

In light of the urgent nature of the matter detailed in paragraph 1.5 above, the decisions were implemented immediately.

5 Comments from Chief Operating Officer (Section 151 Officer) and the Chief Legal Officer

Financial implications

Where decisions made involve the receipt of grants and making of expenditure, this has been identified in the decision summary. The City Council maintains detailed records and forecasts of the financial impacts. Alongside regular financial management activity, the financial implications are included within the Council's financial monitoring reports.

Legal implications

Paragraph 2.3.2 (e) of Part 3F of the Constitution provides for approval of grant agreements by the Chief Executive and the Director of Finance and Resources (Section 151 Officer) following consultation with the relevant Cabinet Member and Leader relating to grant receipt and expenditure over the value of over £2,500,000 if time does not permit consideration by Council.

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