

BARNSELY METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

This matter is not a Key Decision within the Council's definition and has not been included in the relevant Forward Plan

REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR FOR COMMUNITIES TO CABINET ON 1 DECEMBER 2021

Public or private: Public

COST OF LIVING CRISIS - HOUSEHOLD SUPPORT GRANT

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To recommend to Cabinet details of our approach to allocate funding from the DWP's Household Support Grant that is aimed at providing support to people over the winter period and 1 million Council match funding to be used for the same purpose.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 **To agree the approach to delivering the DWP £2.3m Household Support Grant (HSG) (to be named Cost of Living Crisis – Household Support Grant) which has to be spent by 31 March 2022 by working with the following BMBC teams:**
- **Healthier Communities** – to support people with food and wider essentials including essentials linked to energy and water.
 - **Sustainability & Climate Change** – to allocate funds to support people with energy and water bills.
 - **Housing Options** – to support people with emergency housing costs.
- 2.2 **To utilise £1m BMBC match funding to vulnerable households which can be used post March 2022 when the HSG will cease.**
- 2.3 **To move to allocating Local Welfare Assistance (LWA) to vouchers to alleviate supplier and stock issues.**

3. INTRODUCTION

- 3.1 In October 2021 the DWP announced a new round of funding namely the Household Support Grant to support those most in need this winter during the final stages of economic recovery. The funding allocated to Barnsley amounts to £2.3 million. In addition to this the Council has match funded to the sum of £1 million.
- 3.2 The aim of the grant is to provide support to households who would otherwise struggle to buy food or pay essential utility bills or meet other essential living costs or housing costs (in exceptional circumstances of genuine emergency) this winter.

3.3 HSG Eligibility Framework

The funding must be targeted at:

- 50% is for vulnerable households with children
- 50% is available for vulnerable households without children (including individuals).

The funding is to provide support for:

- **Food** - Support with food whether in kind or through vouchers or cash.
- **Energy and water**. Support with energy bills for any form of fuel that is used for the purpose of domestic heating, cooking or lighting, including oil or portable gas cylinders. It can also be used to support with water bills including for drinking, washing, cooking, and sanitary purposes and sewerage.
- **Essentials linked to energy and water**. Support with essentials linked to energy and water (including sanitary products, warm clothing, soap, blankets, boiler service/repair, purchase of equipment including fridges, freezers, ovens, etc.)
- **Wider essentials**. Support with wider essential needs not linked to energy and water. These may include, but are not limited to, support with other bills including broadband or phone bills, clothing, and essential transport-related costs such as repairing a car, buying a bicycle or paying for fuel. This list is not exhaustive.
- **Housing Costs**. In exceptional cases of genuine emergency where existing housing support schemes do not meet this exceptional need, the grant can be used to support housing costs.

The allocation of the funding will take place across 3 business areas:

1. **Healthier Communities** – to support people with food and wider essentials.
2. **Sustainability & Climate Change** – to allocate funds to support people with energy and water.
3. **Housing Options** – to support people with housing costs.

By allocating to 3 areas, we minimise the risk of double funding and we can provide clarity to members of the public on where to go for help.

3.4 Targeting those in need

Funds will be allocated to households who are in receipt of council tax support. Information on how people become eligible for council tax support can be found at <https://www.barnsley.gov.uk/services/advice-benefits-and-council-tax/council-tax/council-tax-support/apply-for-council-tax-support/>

In summary this means that:

- Those eligible will already have been assessed under the CTS scheme.
- We will be able to offer funds to those on low incomes as well as benefits.
- We apply a fair and consistent approach across the 3 areas responsible for allocating the funds.

3.5 The LWA provides support to homeless households with items such as white goods and beds. There have been supplier challenges such as Argos closing their business account. To address this problem households will be issued vouchers where they can still purchase from companies such as Argos.

4. PROPOSAL AND JUSTIFICATION

4.1 That the HSG is allocated across 3 areas administered by the Council. We apply a fair and consistent approach that enables us to monitor uptake, assess demand and use the intelligence for longer term planning and deliver of support.

5. CONSIDERATION OF ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES

5.1 Alternative options to administrate the HSG through the 3rd sector have been explored but there are risks associated with timescales, resource to administrate and that some people may get offered the grant more than once.

5.2 An option to write to all those on CTS issuing a voucher has been explored but it is felt that this is not targeted and will result in some people receiving funds they do not want or will not use.

6. IMPLICATIONS FOR LOCAL PEOPLE, SERVICE USERS & CUSTOMERS

6.1 We know that the coming months could very tough for individuals and families as the cost of living increases (energy / food / petrol etc). This funding can provide a vital resource to preventing crisis situations, homelessness alongside deterioration in wellbeing. Blending this offer with additional offers such as food, welfare advice and support will hopefully avoid cliff edges for Barnsley people.

6.2 The HSG will support people through the winter months and into the new financial year should the funds still be available and not utilised during the first wave of applications.

6.3 LWA will continue whilst funds are available and plans are developed to look at the longer term offer.

7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

7.1 Consultations have taken place with representatives of the Service Director Finance (S151 Officer) and the following summarises the financial implications of the approach to delivering the £2.3m household support grant and £1 million Council match funding.

- The purpose of the Housing Support Grant is to support households who would otherwise struggle to buy food or meet essential utility bills and other essential living expenses, this support is not restricted to those on benefits.
- Barnsley MBCs indicative allocation is £2.3 million and is payable to the Authority in arrears subject to MI returns to be submitted by January 21st 2022 and April 22nd 2022.
- There is an expectation by the Government that some element of the funding is distributed or paid to vulnerable households based on an application process and this is entirely by application.
- The proposal is for support to be managed in 3 main areas and with minimum staffing to support the administration of the scheme (summarised in the table below).

Administration Service Area	Expenditure Type	£,000
Healthier Communities	Food and essentials - vouchers	2,640
Warm Homes	Fuel Poverty – energy & water bills	450
Housing Options Team	Exceptional Housing Costs	50
Admin - postage		60
Staffing Support		100
Total		3,300

We aim to cap each application at £200 per household except in housing where circumstances will be assessed for each applicant bearing in mind that the numbers will be significantly lower than those on CTS.

There are 22,000 households on CTS. We predict a 60% take up which equates to 13,200 households.

If 13,200 households apply we will spend £2.64 million. This enables us to allocate the initial DWP funds which have to be spent by 31 March 2022.

A further £450,000 will be allocated to warms homes which will support on average 900 households with energy bills. This will be capped at £500 per household.

A sum of £50,000 will be allocated to housing for emergency housing support. This will be allocated on a case by case basis.

7.2 In some cases a degree of flexibility will need to be applied to ensure that households receive the support that is required. This may require moving funds between the 3 areas where demand dictates.

7.3 Throughout the Winter period, the Service Director Finance and Service Director Communities will jointly monitor expenditure across the programme and make adjustments accordingly within the restrictions of the grant funding and spirit of the allocations outlined within this report in order to ensure maximization of grant uptake for Barnsley.

8. EMPLOYEE IMPLICATIONS

8.1 There are no implications arising from the report.

11. COMMUNICATIONS IMPLICATIONS

11.1 Through a more consistent borough-wide service offer there is an opportunity to more clearly and easily market the welfare support that is available. This will be the responsibility of the provider and the Council to promote what support is on offer. Communications and Marketing will work across the piece to deliver a concise and customer-facing campaign to enable people to access the right support in the right place. We will work with existing partnership groups to deliver the message across the borough.

12. CONSULTATIONS

12.1 Consultations have been undertaken with:

- Senior Management Team
- Heads of Service for existing service areas referenced
- Benefits and Taxation Service
- Communications Team

13. EQUALITY IMPACT

13.1 Equality Impact Assessment completed

14. THE CORPORATE PLAN AND THE COUNCIL'S PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK

14.1 The recommendations in this report meet the following priorities and outcomes:

- Healthy Barnsley - We have reduced inequalities in health and income across the borough
- Learning Barnsley - People have access to early help and support
- Growing Barnsley - People are supported to have safe, warm and welcoming homes

15. TACKLING THE IMPACT OF POVERTY

- 15.1 The recommendations in this report will help people address poverty over the winter months.

16. TACKLING HEALTH INEQUALITIES

- 16.1 The links between poverty and health are well documented and understood. The recommendations in this report will help to ensure people are accessing the right support that they are entitled to and, as a result, are able to live healthier lives.

17. REDUCTION OF CRIME AND DISORDER

- 17.1 There are no direct implications arising from the report, although it is acknowledged that poverty can be a contributory causal factor for crime.

18. RISK MANAGEMENT ISSUES

- 18.1 There are risks associated with allocation of the HSG which must be mitigated by timely administration of the grant.

19. HEALTH, SAFETY AND EMERGENCY RESILIENCE ISSUES

- 19.1 There are no implications arising from the report.

20. COMPATIBILITY WITH THE EUROPEAN CONVENTION ON HUMAN RIGHTS

- 20.1 There are no implications arising from the report.

21. CONSERVATION OF BIODIVERSITY

- 21.1 There are no implications arising from the report.

22. GLOSSARY

HSG – Household Support Grant
CTS – Council Tax Support

23. LIST OF APPENDICES

None


24. BACKGROUND PAPERS

Existing contracts are held on the Council's contract register.

If you would like to inspect background papers for this report, please email governance@barnsley.gov.uk so that appropriate arrangements can be made

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Financial Implications/Consultation

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(To be signed by the senior Financial Services officer)