

BARNSLEY METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT OF: EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR CORE SERVICES

TITLE: FINAL HOUSEHOLD SUPPORT FUND GRANT 2025/26

REPORT TO:	CABINET
Date of Meeting	14th May 2025
Cabinet Member Portfolio	CORE
Key Decision	No
Public or Private	Public

Purpose of report

In the Autumn statement the Government announced the final extension to the Household Support Fund (HSF), this paper is to provide an overview of the conditions for use of the final iteration of the grant and proposed spending plans covering the period April 25 to March 26 to support those in most need with essential household living costs.

Council Plan priority

The proposals in this report will contribute towards:

Healthy Barnsley – reducing inequalities in health and income across the borough, by providing targeted support to those in most need.

Growing Barnsley – supporting people to have safe, warm and sustainable homes through provision of energy grants and the affordable warm homes programme.

Sustainable Barnsley – provision of more energy efficient and sustainable methods of heating.

Recommendations

That Cabinet:-

- 1. Note the grant conditions associated with the use of the Household Support Grant, as set out in section 2.1 to 2.4.**
- 2. Agree to the proposed spending plan set out in section 2.5.**
- 3. Delegate to the Director of Finance S151 Officer the authority to make any necessary amendments to the scheme and approve the redistribution of underspends to ensure funding is maximised to support the borough within the period of the grant.**

1.0 **BACKGROUND**

- 1.1 In September 2021 the Government announced a package of support to help vulnerable households with essential costs over the winter period and the ongoing economic cost of living crisis. Since then, there have been several extensions to the fund, enabling Barnsley to receive £16.4M investment to support the borough through to March 2025.
- 1.2 In the Autumn 24 budget, the Government announced a final extension to the grant to cover the period April 25 to March 26, with an allocation for Barnsley of £4.1M, taking the total funding investment for the borough to £20.5M.
- 1.3 This paper is to provide an overview of the spending plan for use of the final funding allocation.

2.0 **PROPOSAL**

2.1 Conditions of Grant

- 2.1.1 Guidance provided by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), adopts the same grant conditions as previous rounds, with some additional flexibility in the use of funding.
- 2.1.2 The funding allocation for Barnsley is £4.1M, covering the period April 25 to March 26. No funding can be carried over from this or previous periods.
- 2.1.3 Local Authority spending plans must be submitted to the DWP by 30th May 2025.
- 2.1.4 LA's have the discretion on how the funding can be used, within the scope of DWP guidance.
 - The Fund is intended to cover a wide range of low-income households including families with children of all ages, pensioners, unpaid carers, care leavers, and people with disabilities.
 - Local Authorities should prioritise supporting households with costs associated with:
 - *Energy* – primarily to support energy bills and providing support that can make a quick but sustainable immediate and long-term impact to energy costs.
 - *Food & Water* – support with the cost of food and water bills
 - *Essentials linked to energy & water* – support with other household bills linked to energy and water, in particular repair / replacement of white goods and appliances
 - *Wider Essentials* – essential items not linked to energy and water
 - *Advice Services* – provision of supplementary advice including debt and benefits maximisation
 - *Preventive Support* – provision of crisis support, to prevent poverty and hardship.
 - *Housing Costs* – in exceptional circumstances where other support schemes are not available and there is a genuine emergency.

- LA's can deliver the scheme through a variety of routes including providing cash or vouchers to households, making direct provision of food or goods, or issuing grants to third parties.
- At least part of the scheme should be on an application basis.
- LA's must have a clear rationale or documented policy/framework outlining their approach including how they are defining eligibility and how households access the fund.

2.2 Reporting Requirements

2.2.1 LA's are required to submit 4 data returns to the DWP, 3 interim reports during the year, to determine eligible spend and a final return by the 8th May 2026 showing total spend for the period April 2025 to March 2026 setting out how the grant has been spent and the volumes of households supported.

2.3 Funding Allocations

2.3.1 The funding allocation for Barnsley covering the period April 25 to March 2026 is £4.1M.

2.3.2 Funding allocations will be paid in arrears following receipt of data returns and DWP verification.

2.4 Communications

2.4.1 DWP guidance stipulates the following:

- *It is mandatory for Authorities to reference that the grant is funded by the UK Government in any publicity material, including online channels and media releases in line with the funding guidelines branding.*
- *It is mandatory for Authorities to make public their plans for the Fund, including how and when they intend to deliver the application-based portion of the scheme, and have a webpage dedicated to the Fund.*

2.5 Spending Plan

2.5.1 Sections 2.5.3 – 2.5.5 below set out the proposed spending plans for use of the Fund.

2.5.2 Schemes have been split between an extension to those previously agreed and new initiatives.

2.5.3 Continuation of previously agreed schemes

- **Essential Household Support:** To provide £80 in essential support via a Post Office Vouchers, to LCTS claimants in Band 1 and Care Leavers, to help with the cost of essential household items and energy costs. This will be provided on an auto award basis, provided in 2 vouchers of £40.
- **Support to residents:** delivered by community groups who would be required to bid for grant funding setting out how they would help people in the community over the grant funding

period in line with the grant conditions. For this round we will be looking at how the funding can support people with similar schemes to the previous rounds such as food and hygiene aid, however we will also be looking at how schemes can show sustainability. For example, with the expansion of community pantries. We will also be encouraging community groups to work much more closely together.

- **Local Welfare Assistance:** Funding to ensure the continuation of the local welfare assistance scheme. Providing support to those in financial crisis with the cost of essential household bills and white goods.
- **Free School Meals:** The Healthy Holiday government funded scheme only provides provision during Easter, Summer, and Christmas school holidays. To ensure vulnerable children are supported across all non-term time periods it is proposed to provide a £15 voucher to families during the May 25, October 25, 1 week at Christmas 25 and February 26 holidays to cover the cost of food, this would be a continuation of the support provided to families over the last 4 years.
- **Affordable Warmth Programme:** To contribute towards the overall Affordable Warmth Programme 2022-26 (a 3-year programme approved by Cabinet Cab.14.12.2022/11 in December 2022). The programme provides residents with financial support to help with energy debts and sustainable solutions that help to reduce energy consumption linked to heating; therefore, reducing energy bills. The programme makes an immediate and long-lasting sustainable impact to addressing fuel poverty.
- **CAB Advisor:** To provide funding to Citizens Advice Barnsley to fund an additional Debt and Financial Capability Advisor. This will enable the scope for referrals to be made through the Council's financial vulnerability index to be widened, supporting more people who need it the most. This will enable early intervention and advice around debt, budgeting, income maximisation and money management.
- **Winter Fuel Payments:** To provide £200 payment to pensioners who are not eligible to receive pension credits but are in receipt of LCTS identified as being a low-income household. Funding will be auto awarded and paid via a Post Office Voucher in November 2025.
- **Pension Credit Campaign:** To deliver a communications campaign to promote and encourage uptake of pension credits. The campaign will directly target residents known to be eligible for pension credits but not yet claiming through direct mail shot and wider promotion through media channels and posters / flyers maximising support from the voluntary sector.

2.5.4 New schemes

2.5.5 **Energy Fuel Payments:** To provide immediate top up credits of £49 to residents with pre-payment energy meters facing imminent self-disconnection. This provides immediate support to residents experiencing the most serious fuel poverty. Those receiving a payment receive follow up pro-active support from the councils Warm Homes team providing advice about grants and other measures available to improve home energy efficiency to reduce bills and future reliance on crisis provision.

2.5.6 The funding allocation allows for 5% of the grant to be allocated to administration costs to enable Authorities to deliver the Fund. Funding has specifically been allocated to fund

additional resource to deliver the projects arising from this scheme, an allocation will be made to fund existing officer time to reduce reliance on Council budget.

- 2.5.6 Due to the tight timescale to deliver the above schemes, and support residents, necessary arrangements have been made to deliver the above schemes in anticipation of approval whilst this report is progressed through the governance system.

3.0 IMPLICATIONS

3.1 Financial

- 3.1.1 Consultations have taken place with the Council's Director of Finance (Section 151 Officer).
- 3.1.2 The Household Support Fund is a ring-fenced grant which the Council administers on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions, the grant must be spent in line with the guidance and grant determination letter provided by DWP (summary details set out in section 2.1). There are no implications to the Councils medium term financial strategy.
- 3.1.3 Spending plans and data returns are required to be submitted to DWP as set out in section 2.2, which require Section 151 Officer and Cabinet approval.
- 3.1.4 Grant allocations will be received in arrears following satisfactory submission of data returns as referred to in section 2.3.
- 3.1.5 Any underspend of funding allocations will be returned to the DWP and cannot be used for other purposes or carried over into periods past March 26.
- 3.1.6 The Councils Internal Audit function will be consulted on the arrangements for processing and monitoring spend and outputs to ensure robust controls are in place to meet the requirements of DWP and mitigate the risk of fraud.
- 3.1.7 The table below summarises the financial implications associated with the proposed spending plan for 2025/26. The table also provides details of actual spend incurred against the 2024/25 grant allocation and the number of households supported to demonstrate the positive impact these schemes are having on supporting the borough.
- 3.1.8 The grant allocation for 2025/26 has reduced compared to previous years by approximately £560K. The 2024/25 allocation allowed for a £300K contribution towards the Community Shop, this was a one-off scheme, and funding will not be required from 2025/26 allocation. In addition, funding allocated for Essential Household Costs and the Affordable Warm Homes scheme have been reduced to reflect the reduction in funding available. However, the funding allocated to Community Groups has been enhanced to ensure a more targeted approach is adopted to support the most vulnerable households.

Scheme	Lead Directorate	Application	2024/25 Actual Spend	2024/25 No of Households	2025/26 Proposal
Essential Support £80 payment to LCTS Band 1 claimants & Care Leavers	Core	No	£1,436,540	12,500	£1,007,760
Supporting residents with help towards food, fuel, clothing, white good, household goods.	Public Health & Communities	Yes	£799,800	34,000	£1,000,000
Local Welfare Assistance	Core	Yes	£317,823	307	£300,000
Free School Meal vouchers	Core	No	£624,860	10,700	£626,880
Affordable Warmer Homes	Growth & Sustainability	Yes	£442,277	70	£300,000
CAB Advisor	Core	Referral	£44,018	200	£44,198
Community Shop	Growth & Sustainability	No	£300,000	n/a	n/a
Pension Credit Campaign	Communities	Referral / Signposting	£99,799	835	£100,000
Winter Fuel Payments £200	Core	No	£401,600	2008	£400,000
Energy Fuel Payments (NEW)	Communities	Yes	n/a	n/a	£100,000
Admin Balance			£235,811		£265,195
Total Spend			£4,702,528		£4,144,033

3.2 Legal

3.2.1 In addition to ensuring compliance with terms imposed by the Department for Work and Pensions, the Statutory Guidance for the United Kingdom Subsidy Control Regime document prohibits giving out subsidies unless a view has been taken that the grant of the subsidy is consistent with the subsidy control principles. Having reviewed the proposals there does not appear to be a conflict or lack of compliance in accordance with the Subsidy Control Regime and the proposals contained within this report fall outside of such.

3.2 Governance

Cabinet Terms of Reference includes the following 1 (e) To approve, or approve variations to, strategies and policies, operational plans, programmes, and procedures, which are consistent with the budget and policy framework determined by the full Council

3.3 Equality

3.3.1 The proposals set out in this report for maximisation of the Household Support Fund grant are determined within the parameters set out by the DWP, therefore are in line with the Public Sector Equality Duty and no concerns over unlawful discrimination.

3.4 Sustainability

3.4.1 The sustainability decision-making wheel has been produced for this project and the overall impacts are positive, particularly around reducing carbon emissions, reducing poverty and improving health and well-being of residents.



3.4.2 Pollution from the insulation manufacturing process along with embedded carbon in the supply chain are highlighted as areas of negative impact. However, work is on-going with the procurement team to address how we can build a more sustainable supply chain going forwards.

3.5 Employee

3.5.1 There are no employee implications associated with this report, schemes will be administered within existing resources and recruitment of agency staff to provided dedicated resource to deliver the spending plan.

3.6 Communications

3.6.1 Timely and accurate information will be communicated to residents via the appropriate channels, press releases, social media, council websites and direct engagement with key stakeholders to ensure maximum reach and an inclusive approach to all.

3.6.2 As set out in section 2.4, the Authority must, reference that the grant is funded by the UK Government in any communications and must have a dedicated webpage.

4.0 CONSULTATION

4.1 Consultations have taken place with representatives of Finance, Communities, Housing and Sustainability Business Units when forming spending plan proposals to ensure schemes are developed and targeted at that support those in most need, within the scope of the DWP guidance.

5.0 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

5.1 There are no other options due to the Household Support Fund grant being a ring-fenced government fund. LAs are best placed to administer this fund on behalf of central government.

5.2 Alternative spending plans could be explored; however, these would take time to develop and implement and we are bound by time restrictions to have plans developed and in place to support the borough through 2025/26.

5.3 Should any of the proposals outlined in this report not be delivered or realise any underspend on the grant funding, alternative options will be explored through the provision of direct payments and/or additional cash vouchers, targeted at those in most need to ensure funding is maximised to support borough and not returned to central government. Approval to re-distribute underspends will be sought via the Finance Director, S151 Officer in consultation with the Senior Management Team.

6.0 REASON FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 The recommendations associated with this report are intended to ensure that the Council and partners are positioned to be able to effectively administer and deliver the requirements of DWP and maximisation of the HSF to support residents of the borough.

7.0 GLOSSARY

HSF – Household Support Fund
DWP – Department for Work and Pensions

8.0 APPENDICIES

Appendix A – Financial Implications

9.0 REPORT SIGN OFF

Legal consultation & sign off	Legal Services officer consulted and date Andrew Perriman Monitoring Officer
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	08 April 2025
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