

Report to:	EXECUTIVE CABINET
Date:	26 April 2023
Executive Member:	Councillor Jacqueline North, First Deputy (Finance, Resources & Transformation)
Reporting Officer:	Emma Varnam, Assistant Director of Operations & Neighbourhoods
Subject:	HOUSEHOLD SUPPORT FUND ROUND 4 – APRIL 2023 TO MARCH 2024
Report Summary:	<p>This report proposes the options for the disbursement of the Household Support Fund Round 4 allocated to Tameside. This will follow the split utilised in funding rounds 1 and 2 between:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Funding for families eligible for free school meals to provide support during holiday periods 2. An open support programme into which all residents can apply, offering payments for food, essentials and energy. The full options for this will be brought back in a further report.
Recommendations:	<p>That Executive Cabinet be recommended to agree that:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. £3.08 million is provided for the provision of funding for school holiday periods via supermarket vouchers as previously provided for the year 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024. 2. A further report be received setting out how streams 2 and 3 in the report can be best supported together with any necessary funding to provide administrative support for the distribution of funds.
Corporate Plan:	<p>Supporting low income households, particularly low income families with children links to all of the priorities within the Corporate Plan which are impacted upon by Covid-19.</p> <p>The proposed spending framework fits with the Council's policies around supporting the most vulnerable in our communities.</p>
Policy Implications:	Tameside has identified challenges to residents in low income households and delivery of the Household Support Fund is part of the wider Cost of Living response.
Financial Implications: (Authorised by the statutory Section 151 Officer)	<p>In September 2021 the DWP announced a new one-off Household Support Fund (HSF) to support vulnerable households and individuals during winter 2021/22. The fund is administered by Local Authorities and Tameside was allocated £2,225,000 for the period October 2021 to March 2022. The fund was subsequently extended and a further grant allocation of £4,450,000 was made for the period April 2022 to March 2023.</p> <p>An allocation of £4,449,373 has been confirmed for Tameside for the period April 2023 to March 2024 following an initial announcement by the Chancellor in the Autumn Statement.</p>

The grant must be claimed quarterly in arrears based on actual expenditure including activity and volume information of how many people and households have been assisted. It is essential the maximum grant amount is utilised and claimed within the eligible claim period.

**Legal Implications:
(Authorised by the Borough
Solicitor)**

In effect, this report is seeking to continue the existing household support arrangements based the expected further funding provision. Legal services will continue to work with the project officers as the further details of the funding arrangement is provided to ensure that the funding is spent compliantly.

Risk Management:

HSF needs to be effectively managed to ensure it is accessible to residents eligible for the support and stays within the funding available, this will be done with support from Finance and Audit.

Background Information:

The background papers relating to this report can be inspected by contacting Sarah Jamieson, Head of Economy Employment & Skills



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1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) have awarded £4,449,373 funding for Tameside Council to disburse under Round 4 of the Household Support Fund (HSF), to cover the period 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024. This was announced by the Chancellor in the Autumn Statement as a 12 month support offer, rather than the previous 6 month allocation periods.
- 1.2 The Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) have previously awarded Tameside Council £2,224,686 for Round 3 of their Household Support Fund (HSF) for the period 1 October 2022 to 31 March 2023 and £2,224,686 for Round 2 of their Household Support Fund (HSF) for the period 1 April 2022 to 31 September 2022.
- 1.3 Government have provided guidance which is currently being considered as this now allows wider discretion regarding debt advice. This was provided on 21 February 2023 and is published here [1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024: Household Support Fund guidance for county councils and unitary authorities in England - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)
- 1.4 DWP continue to set specific requirements for what is and is not appropriate usage of this grant funding. This includes that monies should be used to support residents to buy food and basic essentials, along with support for energy bills and other essential costs like necessary phone and internet access. Cover for housing costs is permitted only in 'exceptional circumstances', i.e. only in cases where every other potential avenue has been exhausted to no avail, and not to maintain 'unsustainable tenancies'. Due to the fixed time window for spending the grant funding, DWP have made clear that the funding is not intended to be used for long-term support to any one resident or household, but residents can receive help through this scheme multiple times.

2. PROPOSED PLAN FOR SPENDING

- 2.1 It is proposed that the awarded monies be split across three distinct support streams, each serving a specific purpose and together ensuring that the support offer spread is maximised across the Borough's residents whilst meeting the requirements of the funding.
- 2.2 **Stream 1** is the provision of vouchers to households with children eligible for Free School Meals to cover school breaks during the grant period, this will be administered by Education and is detailed in section 3 of this report.
- 2.3 **Stream 2** would continue the previous open support offer into which residents can apply for an award to cover the costs of food, energy and/or related essentials and is detailed in section 4 of this report.
- 2.4 **Stream 3** would mirror the approach in the majority of other GM localities of providing financial support to community groups, such as Food Banks, to deliver direct and emergency support.

3. STREAM 1

- 3.1 The Household Support Fund (HSF) Round 1, 2 and 3 allocated a significant proportion of funding for food vouchers to be disbursed via schools to families in receipt of school meals. These allocations were different due to changes in guidance made by DWP from Round 2 to Round 3, DWP have not set percentage allocations for funding disbursed for HSF Round 4.

- 3.2 For the period October 2021 to March 2022, Education Service were allocated £1.4m to support families in receipt of Free School Meals (FSM) with a total of £100 in vouchers for the holiday periods:
- October half term (£15 per child)
 - Christmas / New Year holiday (£40 per child)
 - February half term (£15 per child)
 - Easter holiday (£30 per child)
- 3.3 For the period April 2022 to September 2022, Education Service were allocated £978,000 to support families in receipt of Free School Meals (FSM) for the holiday periods below. This was a reduced amount due to Government ring fencing 1/3 of the overall allocation for pensioners; 1/3 to families and 1/3 for local discretion reducing the amount that could be disbursed through schools.
- 'Whit' May/June half term (£15 per child)
 - Summer holiday (£50 per child)
- 3.4 For the period October 2022 to March 2023, Education Service were allocated £1,540,000 to support families in receipt of Free School Meals (FSM) for the holiday periods October half term 2022; Christmas / New Year 2022/23; February half term 2023; and Easter 2023, continuing the existing process of disbursing vouchers via schools for use in a supermarket. The supermarket is chosen by each school. The allocation was increased to reflect the increasing numbers of families eligible for Free School Meals (FSM) and the increased cost of living. The allocation was expected to support 14,230 families, this number will be confirmed within the monitoring report provided to DWP once the funding period ends.
- 3.5 It is proposed that £3,080,000 is provided for the provision of funding for school holiday periods for the year 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024. This equates to the same amount available for Household Support Fund Round 3.

4. STREAM 2

- 4.1 An open application process, utilising an online application form, face to face 'drop in' support based in Tameside One and telephone support administered by a team of Assessment Officers has been successfully used to deliver the direct application element of Household Support Fund (HSF) Round 3 and it is proposed that this is continued into Round 4.
- 4.2 A further report will be brought to fully consider the options for how this element of the funding can be disbursed, whilst noting that an application based process must form part of this as stated in the guidance.

5. STREAM 3

- 5.1 Household Support Fund (HSF) Round 1 included disbursing funds via Action Together to enable a rapid response within the timeframe available. This was not continued in Rounds 2 and 3 due to the increased Management Information (MI) requirements from DWP however research is demonstrating the use of food banks is outweighing donation levels due to cost of living impacting previous regular donators. To respond to these difficulties it will be proposed that an element of the fund is used to provide direct emergency support to the community and this will be further explored in the follow up report.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 6.1 As set out at the front of the report.