

WORCESTERSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

RECORD OF OFFICER EXECUTIVE DECISION

TITLE:*	Household Support Fund programme (April 2025 to March 2026)
Decision Taken By:	Mark Fitton – Strategic Director for Adults and Communities
Cabinet Member	Karen May, Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Communities
Decision Made*	Approval of the Household Support Fund programme from April 2025 – March 2026
Is this Report Exempt as per Schedule 12A Local Government Act 1972	No
Decision taken under the following delegation:	<p>Delegation to Director to make decisions on the Household Support Fund at the Cabinet meeting on 30 March 2023 as follows:</p> <p>RESOLVED:</p> <p>Delegated the implementation of the delivery of the Household Support Fund including the allocation of any extension to the grant within the terms applicable to it, to the Strategic Director of People in consultation with the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Communities and in liaison with the Chief Financial Officer.</p> <p>Agenda for Cabinet on Thursday, 30th March, 2023, 10.00 am - Worcestershire County Council (moderngov.co.uk)</p>
Division(s) Affected	Countywide
Date of Decision*	
Summary of Decision*	<p>Following on from the announcement by the Government, the Household Support Fund scheme in the Autumn Statement on the 30 October 2024 and formal confirmation albeit at a slightly reduced amount sent by the Department of Work and Pensions on 4 March 2025. The following proposals have been developed in conjunction with key delivery partners including District Council lead officers, Worcestershire Advice Network and Act on Energy and approved by District Chief Executives.</p>

In this programme there has been an overall budget reduction of 12% of all previous schemes and some changes to the guidance. There are now two key areas of support outlined:

A) Crisis support

- a. Essentials – energy, water and food
- b. Wider essentials – bills, clothing, period and hygiene products, essential transport costs, one off payments to prevent a crisis
- c. Housing – where DHP and homelessness prevention duty aren't applicable. Mortgage support cannot be provided. Historic rent arrears can be provided but only in exceptional and emergency circumstances.

B) Preventative support

- a. Advice services
- b. Joining up between service providers
- c. Longer term and sustainable solutions

The total grant allocation is **£6,960,240.56** over twelve months and the activity breakdown is proposed as follows:

Programme summary	Managed centrally	District allocation	Total
Food	£2,320,712.64	£108,000.00	£2,428,712.64
Energy	£1,435,000.00	£0.00	£1,435,000.00
Food/energy/wider essentials	£795,000.00	£1,595,072.92	£2,390,072.92
Administration, staffing and contingency	£159,000.00	£0.00	£159,000.00
Information, advice and prevention	£547,455.00	£0.00	£547,455.00
Total	£5,257,167.64	£1,703,072.92	£6,960,240.56

Food - £2,428,712.64

Holiday food vouchers in all school holidays from April to the start of the new academic year in September 2025 for children in receipt of free school meals. There will be a move away from £3 per day due to the budget reduction, the increase in FSM recipients and guidance changes. This will be replaced by a holiday allocation which will reflect the time of year and availability of the newly extended HAF programme. Due to the change in guidance, schools will be consulted during the summer term around the approach from September 2025 through to the end of March 2026 for the remaining £1million allocation. There will also be £18k for each district council additional to the main allocation specifically for food support (and/or warm spaces depending on local demand and priorities).

Energy - £1,435,000

Continue the energy support scheme through Act on Energy for support with energy costs, energy debt and new heating systems for eligible households. The top up payments for those with high energy use medical devices will still be included but it will be incorporated within the new budget which reflects the grant reduction. The Money Management Advisors employed through the Citizen's Advice in the county will also be extended for a further twelve months supporting eligible residents with energy debts. Home energy checks and wider preventative support will continue to be available to older and other vulnerable households, delivered by the two Age UKs in the county. The Warmth on Prescription programme, working with primary care within the NHS will also continue over the winter period.

Food/Energy/Wider essentials – £2,390,072.92

Continue the Post Office voucher scheme delivered through Worcestershire Advice Network, including support for low-income households for; pensioners, carers, residents with a disability and high energy use medical devices. Cash vouchers of £75 - £225 are available depending on number of criteria met. New Pension Credit recipients will continue to receive a one off £75 Post Office cash voucher. One off winter payments for shared lives carers and care leavers of £75 are also included as in previous schemes.

Administration, staffing and contingency - £159,000

Costs towards staff support, contract and administration costs for schemes and a small contingency. Spend will be reviewed on an ongoing basis, but a full review will be undertaken in February 2026 and allocation of any uncommitted funds will be considered at that point.

Information, advice and prevention - £547,455

A number of schemes split their administration costs between advice and administration to ensure capacity is in place to provide some longer-term advice rather than a one-off voucher only. In addition, there is a proposed allocation of £50k per district area of additional prevention activity through information and advice provision, which will be delivered through WAN partners, contracted through the county council commissioned service, but also locally agreed with District Council leads.


District Councils funding £1,595,072.92


(included within the above breakdown of food/energy/wider essentials)

Plans for district spend will be submitted in early May for inclusion in the DWP delivery plan which will cover a range of activity across all eligible spend areas including; food banks, vouchers schemes, discretionary social welfare schemes and voluntary sector grants.

District Council allocations are as follows and calculated using the Index of Multiple Deprivation figures (as agreed by District Council Chief

	<p>Executives in February 2023), but with a reduction in line with the overall reduction.</p> <p>In addition, districts will have a further £18k each specifically to support food or warm space provision, to be agreed at district level depending on the most appropriate investment for each area.</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="550 481 1404 784"> <thead> <tr> <th></th> <th>General HSF Allocation</th> <th>Food/Warm spaces</th> <th>Total</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Bromsgrove</td> <td>£171,321.39</td> <td>£18,000.00</td> <td>£189,321.39</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Malvern Hills</td> <td>£235,312.23</td> <td>£18,000.00</td> <td>£253,312.23</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Redditch</td> <td>£329,900.14</td> <td>£18,000.00</td> <td>£347,900.14</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Worcester</td> <td>£298,995.28</td> <td>£18,000.00</td> <td>£316,995.28</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Wychavon</td> <td>£230,918.03</td> <td>£18,000.00</td> <td>£248,918.03</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Wyre Forest</td> <td>£328,625.52</td> <td>£18,000.00</td> <td>£346,625.52</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Total</td> <td>£1,595,072.59</td> <td>£108,000.00</td> <td>£1,703,072.59</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>		General HSF Allocation	Food/Warm spaces	Total	Bromsgrove	£171,321.39	£18,000.00	£189,321.39	Malvern Hills	£235,312.23	£18,000.00	£253,312.23	Redditch	£329,900.14	£18,000.00	£347,900.14	Worcester	£298,995.28	£18,000.00	£316,995.28	Wychavon	£230,918.03	£18,000.00	£248,918.03	Wyre Forest	£328,625.52	£18,000.00	£346,625.52	Total	£1,595,072.59	£108,000.00	£1,703,072.59
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Reason(s) For Decision*	<p>Tier one authorities (County or Unitary Councils) are required to deliver the Household Support Fund grant. The new programme was confirmed by the Department of Work and Pensions on 30 October 2024 and the guidance and budget confirmed on the 4 March 2025 with a 1 April 2025 start date. A formal decision on the delivery is required before the new programme can commence.</p>																																
Alternative Options Considered and Rejected	<p>Do nothing – if a delivery plan is not considered and approved, the funding from the Department of Work and Pensions would not be available to support Worcestershire residents in relation to the increase in cost of living.</p> <p>No other options were considered following engagement with lead partners. The current delivery plan has been agreed as the most effective way to support residents.</p>																																
Summary of any financial implications	<p>There are no direct financial implications as this programme of activity, delivered through the Household Support Fund Grant, is fully funded through the external grant from the Department of Work and Pensions.</p>																																
Summary of any legal implications	<p>Worcestershire County Council has a statutory duty regarding children and are generally responsible for Local Welfare Assistance. The Department for Work and Pensions has provided this funding to the Council under section 31 of the Local Government Act 2003, to administer the Household Support Fund and provide assistance to households most in need. Local Authorities have a discretion on exactly how this funding is used but it must be within the scope set out in the grant conditions and guidance documentation provided by the DWP. The expectation is that it should primarily be used to support households in the most need particularly those including children, pensioners, disabled residents and carers who would otherwise struggle with energy bills, food, water bills, other essential household costs and housing costs in exceptional circumstances.</p>																																

<p>Consultation process and results</p>	<p>The Chief Financial Officer and the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Communities have been consulted on this decision.</p> <p>District Council Chief Executives have also been consulted alongside District Council lead officers for the programme and key stakeholder delivery partners.</p>
<p>Equality duty Implications</p>	<p>A full Equality and Public Health Impact Assessment has been carried out in respect of the Household Support Fund (HSF) implementation in Worcestershire.</p> <p>There is a potential negative impact around marriage and civil partnerships as the HSF scheme for a one off cash voucher of £75 to households newly registered on pension credit has a criteria that payments are one per household. So, where two people, both on pension credit are living together, they will only get one voucher, whereas if they were living separately, they would both get the payment. This is only the case for the small proportion of the programme where cash vouchers are issued to households on pension credit.</p> <p>There are multiple other HSF schemes that the same households could apply to for support if they meet the relevant criteria. This is referenced in communication about the cash voucher they have been awarded.</p> <p>The risks identified were in relation to not reaching vulnerable residents. The mitigation is around the wide range of schemes in place targeting different groups of vulnerable residents working with district councils, countywide and district charities with smaller local organisations providing support through grants from the district council allocation of funding.</p> <p>Communication about the programme is embedded through a range of council and partner channels including; social media, flyer distribution, electronic flyers (doctors surgeries/libraries), event attendance and press releases.</p> <p>Due to the change in guidance, schools will be consulted during the summer term around the approach from September 2025 through to the end of March 2026 for the remaining £1million allocation. A separate Joint Impact Assessment will be undertaken if any significant changes are proposed.</p>  <p>EqualityPublicHealthFund_Household Support</p>
<p>Social Value Implications</p>	<p>There are no direct contractual social value implications as a large proportion of the programme is led by voluntary sector organisations who are using a mix of paid staff and volunteers to maximise support to eligible residents through the Household Support Fund.</p>
<p>Any Conflict of Interest declared</p>	<p>None</p>

by a consulted Cabinet Member/ any dispensation granted*	
Background documents*	Cabinet report for Household Support Fund delivery in 2023/24 approved on 30 March 2023.
Signature	
Reference/Date Published	For use by Democratic Services only
Monitoring Officer Review needed	Yes/No (delete as appropriate)

*Legal Requirement