



# Report to Cabinet

<b>Date:</b>	10 <sup>th</sup> May 2022
<b>Title:</b>	<b>Government funding supporting Buckinghamshire Residents</b>
<b>Cabinet Member(s):</b>	Steve Bowles – Cabinet Member for Communities
<b>Contact officer:</b>	Gill Harding / Matt Everitt
<b>Ward(s) affected:</b>	None specific
<b>Recommendations:</b>	<b>This report provides an update on the previous funding allocation, how this was used, and a recommendation for how the additional Household Support Fund will be used to support Buckinghamshire Residents which Cabinet is asked to approve.</b>
<b>Reason for decision:</b>	The proposed approach for use of the additional Household Support Fund has been modelled to ensure this provides support for Buckinghamshire residents through to the end of September in line with Government guidance

## 1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 Government have released funding to support residents in Buckinghamshire since 2020, initially through the Winter Grant and Local Support Grant, and subsequently through the Household Support Fund.
- 1.2 For the period November 2021 to March 2022, Buckinghamshire was awarded £2.4m of funding from the Household Support Fund to provide support for residents in need of help with food, fuel and other essential household costs.
- 1.3 In the Spring Statement 2022, the Chancellor confirmed that the Household Support Fund would be extended, and this equates to a further £2.4m for Buckinghamshire to use to support residents between 1<sup>st</sup> April and 30<sup>th</sup> September 2022.
- 1.4 This paper summarises how the previous funding allocations were used, and sets out a proposed use of the additional fund between now and the end of September that will ensure this is targeted to residents in need of support and in line with the Government guidance.

## 2. Content of Report

### Previous funding allocations

#### December 2020 – September 2021

2.1 Funding received during this period totalled £2.4m, via the Winter Grant and Local Support Grant. These grants could be utilised from 1<sup>st</sup> December onwards, in line with the Government directive to ensure children and families get extra support during the winter period, and ensuring vulnerable households do not go hungry or without essential items.

2.2 Government specified parameters for use of these funds:

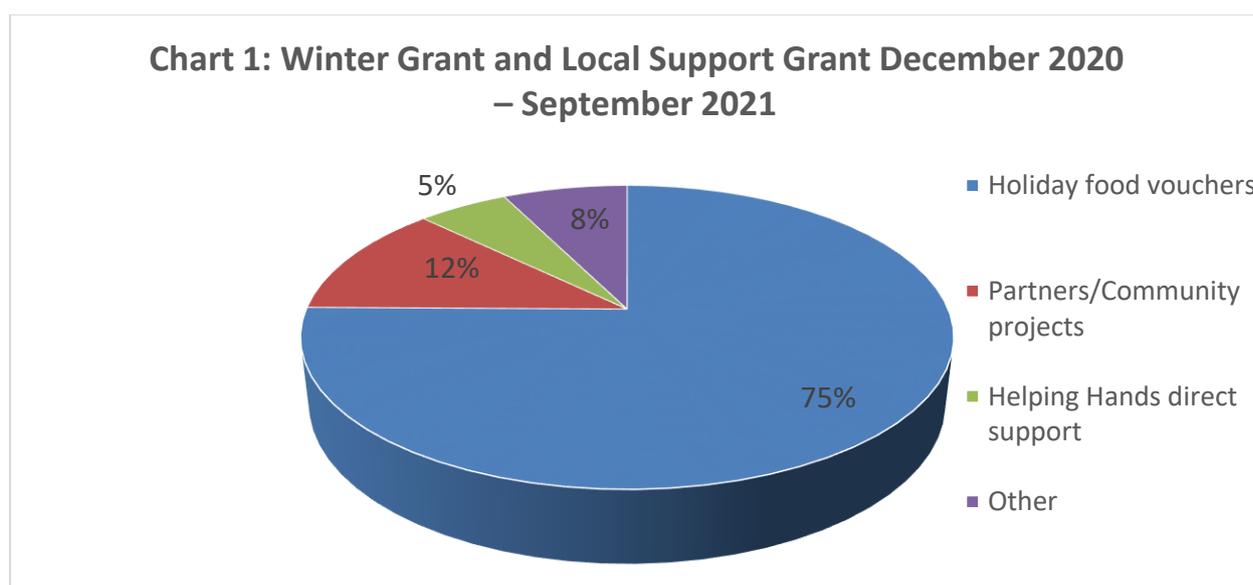
2.2.1 80% of the fund was for families with children, the remaining 20% could be provided for residents experiencing, or at risk of, poverty

2.2.2 80% was for use on food, energy and/or water bill

2.2.3 20% could be used on other essential expenditure for households, for example on essential toiletries, boiler repair costs, purchase or maintenance of fridges/freezers, etc.

2.2.4 The fund could not be used to cover rent or housing costs and could also not be used for the provision of debt or financial advice.

2.3 In Buckinghamshire, over 75,000 households were supported with this fund. Use of this funding is detailed in the chart below:



2.4 The fund:

2.4.1 Enabled over 54,800 Holiday support vouchers to be distributed to eligible families, with a combined value of just over £1.85 million over 5 holiday periods.

2.4.2 Supported many VCS support activities ranging from Food Banks to Lunch clubs to Hot Meal Delivery schemes, with a combined value of just under £300,000 providing support to approx. 9,500 households.

2.4.3 In total, enabled support to be provided to over 75,000 households, including help with food, help with their energy bills, help to purchase essential white goods and essentials to keep them warm including clothing. This includes just under £170,000 of support being provided directly by the Helping Hand team.

### October 2021 to March 2022

2.5 A further £2.4m was allocated via the Household Support Fund to Buckinghamshire for the period 1st October 2021 to 31st March 2022. This fund was provided to support households in the most need with energy costs, food and water bills, as well as covering other essential household costs and housing costs in exceptional circumstances.

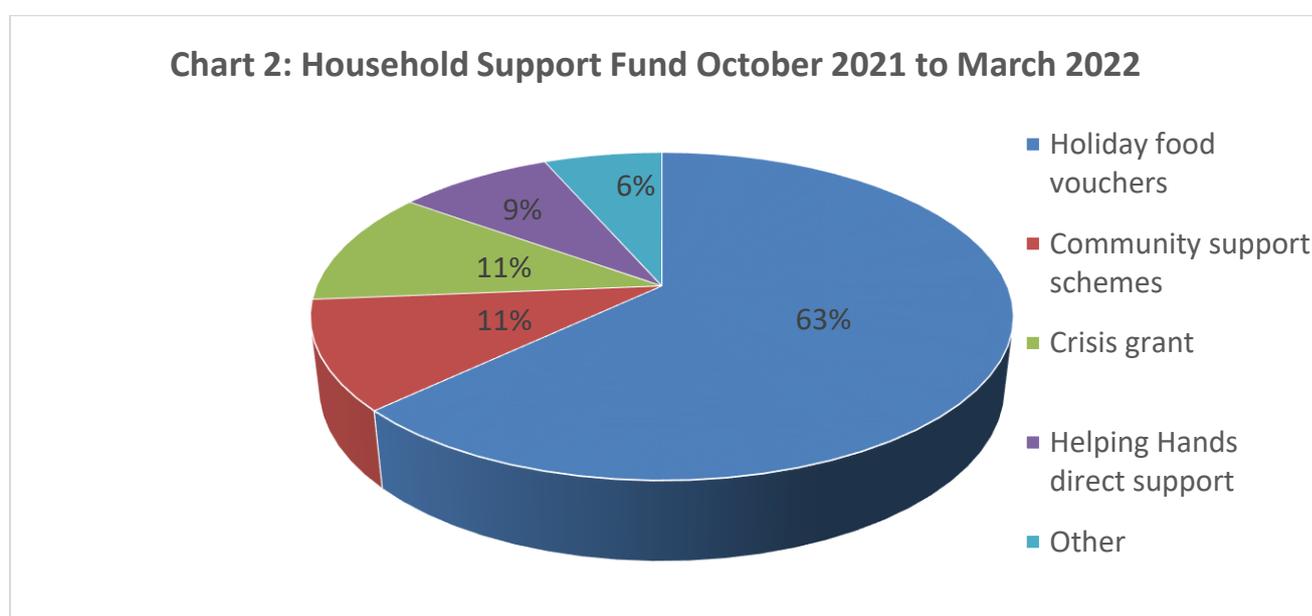
2.6 Government guidance regarding usage of this fund was similar to that for the Winter Grant and Local Support Grant, with a few key differences:

2.6.1 50% of the fund was for families with children, 50% was for residents experiencing, or at risk of, poverty

2.6.2 The Household Support Fund could be used to cover a broader range of household essentials, including phone bills, transport related costs and broadband charges

2.6.3 In exceptional circumstances this fund could be used to pay for housing costs, for example to cover rent payments, where existing housing support schemes do not meet this need.

2.7 In Buckinghamshire, over 72,000 households were supported with this fund. Use of this funding is detailed in the chart below:



## 2.8 The fund:

- 2.8.1 enabled over 37,000 Holiday support vouchers to be distributed to eligible families with a combined value of just over £1.5 million over 3 holiday periods
- 2.8.2 Supported over 40 Voluntary and Community Sector support activities ranging from Food Banks to Lunch clubs to Hot Meal Delivery schemes, and including a crisis grant support scheme administered through Heart of Bucks. Combined value allocated to the Voluntary and Community Sector of over £500,000
- 2.8.3 In total, enabled support to be provided to over 72,000 households, including help with food, help with their energy bills, help to purchase essential white goods and essentials to keep them warm including clothing. This includes just over £210,000 of support being provided directly from the Helping Hand team.

## 3. Helping Hand

- 3.1 The Helping Hand team have led and coordinated use of these funds across Buckinghamshire for the Council.
- 3.2 This team works collaboratively across internal Council departments and with partners to identify, engage and assist residents who require additional support for Food, Warmth and Household living costs. This includes with Adult Social Care and Children's Services, and referrals are received from social workers on behalf of their clients.
- 3.3 This service model has enabled the development and maintenance of excellent relationships between the Council and the voluntary and community sector, and ensured that the impact of funding provided through these grants is enhanced through further community based-support in areas of need. For example, we have provided support into community groups where we know there is the greatest need and where perhaps the community were less likely to reach out for support.
- 3.4 This approach has also resulted in better insight and intelligence to enable better understanding of our residents and communities, which can then be used to inform activity and interventions delivered by the Council, by the voluntary and community sector, and by our strategic partners including housing associations and the Department for Work and Pensions.
- 3.5 We have developed a more appropriate signposting approach based on feedback from communities and have engaged in community events including job fairs to ensure that there is awareness of the help and support available. The Helping Hand Team has delivered awareness raising activity within job centres, with Housing Association Welfare Teams and with the Social Prescriber Network to ensure all those who are engaging with residents are aware of what is available.
- 3.6 There are significant challenges that the service has overcome to enable successful utilisation of these funds for vulnerable residents in Buckinghamshire, including:
  - 3.6.1 Quickly scaling up the offer in line with the Government framework, developing the Helping Hand approach and ensuring visibility for residents and partners

- 3.6.2 Managing service delivery tightly in line with the Government framework and the short term nature and notice of the government funding
- 3.6.3 Ensuring that residents most in need benefited from the funds, including using a broad range of data to identify these cohorts and address stigma that can be associated with asking the Council for help
- 3.6.4 Establishing at pace appropriate systems, tools and controls for case management, voucher delivery and grant funding to the voluntary and community sector.

#### **4. Household Support Fund April – September 2022**

- 4.1 In the Spring Statement 2022, the Chancellor confirmed that the Household Support Fund would be extended, and this equates to a further £2.4m for Buckinghamshire to use to support residents between 1<sup>st</sup> April and 30<sup>th</sup> September 2022.
- 4.2 The new fund is intended to provide support to vulnerable households in most need of support to help with significantly rising living costs. Whilst the general purpose of the fund is the same as that provided previously, there are changes to the ring-fenced requirements on how this is allocated within each Local Authority area.
- 4.3 For the new fund, at least one-third will be allocated to support families with children, at least one-third will be allocated to pensioners and up to one-third will be allocated to other vulnerable households in need of support.
- 4.4 Within the parameters set out in 4.3, the Household Support Fund can be used to cover:
  - 4.4.1 Energy bills relating to heating, cooking or lighting; and water bills
  - 4.4.2 Support with food costs either through vouchers or cash
  - 4.4.3 Other household essentials – this may include those linked to energy and water, for example sanitary products, boiler repair or servicing, warm clothing, purchase of fridge/freezers; or for wider essentials, for example broadband costs, phone costs, clothing, transport-related costs such as car repairs
  - 4.4.4 Housing costs can be covered in exceptional circumstances and where existing housing schemes do not meet this exceptional need. For example, the fund cannot be used to provide mortgage support but can be used to cover historic rent arrears that have been built up prior to receipt of other benefits
  - 4.4.5 The fund can also be used to cover reasonable administration costs, including staff costs, web page design, IT system costs and promotional activity and content to raise the profile of the scheme
  - 4.4.6 As before, the fund cannot be used to cover mortgage costs and cannot be used to provide debt and financial advice services.

## 5. Proposed allocation of the Household Support Fund April to September 2022

5.1 The table below sets out the proposed allocation of the £2.4m that Buckinghamshire will receive from the new Household Support Fund.

5.2 These proposals are in line with Government Guidance and are modelled around local understanding of need across different categories, informed by local intelligence and previous delivery of the funds detailed in section 2 of this report. Funding will only be used for schemes that are free to residents.

**Table 1: Proposed Allocation of Household Support Fund April – September 2022**

Allocation	% of fund	Target group	Type of Support (as per section 4.4)	Delivery mechanism
£250k	10%	Covering all target groups	All types of support	Helping Hand
£600k	25%	Covering all target groups	All types of support	Voluntary and Community organisations providing free support to residents, Heart of Bucks crisis fund, Better Housing Better Health (national energy redress scheme)
£880k	37%	Children/young people: Free School Meals / Early Years Support / Schools / Colleges inc. Afghan/Ukraine refugees May Half Term £15 per week Summer Holidays £50 for whole period	Food support	Digital Voucher for school holidays
£50k	2%	Children/young people/families highlighted by Educational Establishments as requiring additional financial support	All types of support	Digital Voucher or other appropriate support
£50k	2%	Vulnerable Children/families known to Social Care Services including Care Leavers	All types of support	Digital Voucher or other appropriate support.eg clothing/White goods/furniture fuel support
£200k	8%	Elderly and Vulnerable Adults	All types of support	Digital Voucher or other appropriate support
£200k	8%	Pensioners currently receiving Council Tax discretionary support	All types of support	Credit council tax accounts (subject to Government guidance) or other appropriate support

- 5.3 In addition to the allocations listed in the table above, approximately £170k will be used to cover overhead costs in line with the government guidance detailed in 4.4.5.
- 5.4 Residents may be eligible for support across multiple categories listed in the table above. Residents may also be eligible to receive support on multiple occasions during the period.

## **6. Additional support available for Buckinghamshire residents**

- 6.1 In addition to the support provided through the Winter Grant, Local Support Grant, and Household Support Fund, Buckinghamshire Council has made further provision to assist residents who are in need.
- 6.2 The Government advised that a £150 Council Tax rebate would be provided to eligible households, for which £18m nationally to offset rising energy costs.
- 6.3 Eligible households are defined as properties occupied on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2022 and are:
- 6.3.1 Someone's sole or main residence valued in Council Tax bands A to D; or valued in band E, but with an alternative valuation band of band D, as a result of the disabled band reduction scheme
  - 6.3.2 A chargeable dwelling, or in exemption classes N (occupied only by students), S (all the occupiers are under 18 years of age), U (occupiers are severely mentally impaired) or W (a granny annexe)
  - 6.3.3 Not occupied by a local authority, a corporate body or other body such as a housing association, the government or governmental body.
- 6.4 Within Buckinghamshire, there are approximately 100,000 properties meeting this criteria and who will receive payment of £150, starting from the week commencing Monday 2<sup>nd</sup> May.
- 6.5 The Government allocated a further £1.2m nationally to provide support via a discretionary fund. Councils have been asked to determine locally how best to make use of this award to other households who are energy bill payers, but not covered by the rebate scheme, up to a maximum payment of £150 per household. This fund is aimed at those households in Council Tax bands E to H who do need financial assistance to help pay for the increase in energy bill charges.
- 6.6 We have determined to award this discretionary fund to households in Buckinghamshire who are on a qualifying benefit or have an exemption due to severe mental impairment. As a result, approximately a further 3,100 households will receive £150, and a further 25,000 households who are on a qualifying benefit will receive an additional £25 on top.
- 6.7 The Buckinghamshire Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) Programme is funded by the Department for Education and provides free, high-quality holiday activity clubs with a healthy hot meal for children from low-income families. The government has confirmed the continuation of the HAF programme for the next three financial years until March 2025. The programme runs in the longer school holiday periods (Easter, summer and

Christmas) for children in Reception to Year 11 inclusive who receive benefits-related free school meals.

- 6.8 In 2021 the HAF programme enabled over 2,000 individual children and young people across the county to enjoy over 9,000 holiday activity club sessions and hot meals during the school holidays.
- 6.9 In 2022, the Council can also offer HAF holiday club places to certain groups of children and young people who are not in receipt of benefits-related free school meals, but who could benefit from HAF provision. This means that we will be able to reach and support more vulnerable children and young people in Buckinghamshire to have a more enjoyable holiday experience.

## **7. Summary**

- 7.1 Buckinghamshire Council is committed to ensuring that vulnerable residents who are most in need receive support via our Helping Hand service.
- 7.2 The support and intervention we have provided previously, through grant funding received from Government, Council Tax rebates and discretionary schemes, has benefitted many thousands of residents across the County and ensured that families and vulnerable people have had access to food, water, clothing, warmth and other essential items.
- 7.3 The proposals detailed in this paper aim to ensure that the new allocation of the Household Support Fund is utilised in a targeted and effective manner between now and the end of September, to reduce the impact of the increased cost of living crisis, poverty and financial hardship for Buckinghamshire residents.

## **8. Legal and financial implications**

- 8.1 The Secretary of State determines the authorities to which grant is to be paid and the amount of grant to be paid.
- 8.2 The Household Support Fund Grant indicative funding allocation for Buckinghamshire Council for the period 1st April to 30th September 2022 is £2,399,190.54. Pursuant to section 31(3) and 31(4) of the Local Government Act 2003, the Secretary of State determines that the grant will be paid in respect of this period.
- 8.3 The grant is paid to the Authority to support eligible expenditure only, in line with guidance from the Department for Work and Pensions; and on the basis overall that the provision of grant funding remains subject to the Secretary of State's ongoing satisfaction that all grant usage by the Authority complies fully with the relevant conditions.

- 8.4 Funding is paid in arrears and following completion of a data return to the Department for Work and Pensions. The amount of grant funding Buckinghamshire receives from the allocation listed in 8.2 will be in line with the evidence provided in the data return. This approach is in line with previous grants and the Helping Hand, Business Intelligence and Finance teams will work together to complete the required returns.
- 8.5 County Councils and Unitary Authorities have a statutory duty regarding children and are generally responsible for Local Welfare Assistance. The Department for Work and Pensions is providing funding to County Councils and Unitary Authorities (including Metropolitan Councils and London Boroughs), under section 31 of the Local Government Act 2003, to administer the scheme and provide assistance to households most in need.
- 8.6 Local Authorities have discretion on exactly how this funding is used within the scope set out in guidance documentation provided by the Department for Work and Pensions. The expectation is that it should primarily be used to support households in the most need particularly those including children and pensioners who would otherwise struggle with energy bills, food, water bills, other essential household costs and housing costs in exceptional circumstances.
- 8.7 An initial Equalities Impact Assessment has been completed and identified no negative impact from the proposals in this report. A copy of this is available on request. Criteria, eligibility and processes are all being reviewed further to ensure that they comply with equalities requirements.

## **9. Corporate implications**

- 9.1 This report reflects the priority for the Communities Portfolio to develop the Helping Hand programme to tackle food insecurity in local communities.

## **10. Local councillors & community boards consultation & views**

- 10.1 Not applicable – Portfolio Holder consulted.

## **11. Communication, engagement & further consultation**

- 11.1 Following this decision a communications plan will be developed to continue to promote the Helping Hand service and raise awareness of support available to residents who are most in need.

## **12. Next steps and review**

- 12.1 Following this decision the Helping Hand service will coordinate use of the Household Support Fund in line with the allocations set out in Table 1.

### **13. Background papers**

13.1 Not applicable.

### **14. Your questions and views (for key decisions)**

14.1 If you have any questions about the matters contained in this report please get in touch with the author of this report. If you have any views that you would like the cabinet member to consider please inform the democratic services team. This can be done by telephone [01296 382343] or email [democracy@buckinghamshire.gov.uk]