

Report to Council

6 September 2023

By the Cabinet Member for Housing, Communities and Wellbeing

DECISION REQUIRED



Not Exempt

Housing grants – Approval of budget

Executive Summary

Council is recommended to increase the community development income and expenditure budgets so that the team can receive and spend an additional grant that has been allocated by West Sussex County Council (WSSCC). The grant, Household Support Fund (HSF) has restrictions and receipt of it was not known when the annual budget for 2023-2024 was set. Notification of the £255,000 grant was received in August 2023 and is required to be used within the current financial year.

The grant has been allocated to the Council with generalised areas of focus for use. These include:

- Food and fuel voucher support – this continues previous schemes that have been administered by Citizens Advice and Horsham Matters in previous years.
- Funding to build resilience and capacity for services working with those most affected by the cost of living. This will focus upon food and utility support, financial support and advice plus warm spaces/warm hub provision and operational support.
- Funds to specifically target households that are financially vulnerable. We will look to target households that have not received any previous central government funding through cost-of-living payments.
- Funds to enable a series of multi-agency networking and information sharing events. This will support more joint working, less duplication and a better experience for residents who need support from several services.

Recommendations

That the Council:

- i) Approves the receipt and expenditure of the grant in the sum of £255,000 for Household Support Fund
- ii) Approve an increase in the community development team's 2023/24 revenue income and expenditure budgets of £255,000 to cater for the receipt of the grant

Reasons for Recommendations

- i) Increasing the revenue income and expenditure budgets in the community development service will allow the Council to receive and spend the grant offered by WSCC
- ii) Full Council must approve an increase to the community development team's budget
- iii) To provide appropriate support for residents and organisations supporting residents affected by the cost of living as specified in the grant conditions

Background Papers

None

Wards affected: All

Contact: Rob Jarvis - Head of Housing and Community Services

Background Information

1 Introduction and Background

- 1.1 In August 2023, WSCC allocated the Council £255,000 of grant income for the Household Support Fund scheme. The Council must demonstrate that the funds have been used within the parameters with which they have been awarded.
- 1.2 The grant has been allocated with specific approaches to the allocation agreed. These are:
 - Food and fuel voucher support – this continues previous schemes that have been administered by Citizens Advice and Horsham Matters in previous years.
 - Funding to build resilience and capacity for services working with those most affected by the cost of living. This will focus upon food and utility support, financial support and advice plus warm spaces/warm hub provision and operational support.
 - Funds to specifically target households that are financially vulnerable. We will look to target households that have not received any previous central government funding through cost-of-living payments.
 - Funds to enable a series of multi-agency networking and information sharing events. This will support more joint working, less duplication and a better experience for residents who need support from several services.

2 Relevant Council policy

- 2.1 The funds received support the Council in meeting the priorities set out in the Council's corporate plan to ensure Horsham District is a great place to live with a strong, safe and healthy community. Specifically, these funds will support the Council in ensuring that support is available for those residents and organisations supporting residents impacted by cost-of-living pressures.

3 Details

- 3.1 The use of the grant will be monitored quarterly and reported to WSCC. The purpose of this report is to seek approval to receive these funds and increase the financial budget of the community development team by a corresponding amount. This will allow the team to work with those who need the support. The provision of this support will be administered and reported in accordance with the grant criteria.
- 3.2 The community development team will seek to work in partnership with other authorities locally for efficiencies and increased impact where possible. However, if all the funds are not used they will be returned to WSCC for use in other areas of the County.

4 Next Steps

- 4.1 The recommendations in this report need to be discussed and approved by Full Council as detailed in this report.

5 Views of the Policy Development Advisory Group and Outcome of Consultations

- 5.1 Given the short timeframe between the allocation of the grant and the Council meeting a physical meeting of the Housing, Communities and Wellbeing Policy Development Advisory Group has not been possible. All members of the Policy Development Advisory Group have been consulted electronically. Of the eleven members of the group, nine have provided their support to receive and use the grant, one was on leave and one has not responded.

The Chairman of Overview and Scrutiny and Leaders of the opposition parties were also made aware of the grant allocation in advance of the report.

- 5.2 The Monitoring Officer and the Director of Resources were consulted to ensure legal and financial probity.

6 Other courses of action considered but rejected

- 6.1 The Council has considered not accepting these funds from WSCC. This option has been dismissed as there is the possibility of increased adverse impact on local residents if we are unable to implement appropriate preventative options (which could be funded by these grants) at an earlier stage.

7 Resource consequences

- 7.1 Any additional options for the specified client groups identified within the grant parameters will be met within the existing team structure.
- 7.2 The additional revenue budget income of £255,000 received through these grants will be used to meet expenditure in this area with unspent funds being returned to WSCC. There is no net effect on the revenue budget. The funding must be spent by 31 March 2024.

8 Legal considerations and implications

- 8.1 Section 31 of the Local Government Act 2003 enables central government to make a grant for any purpose, capital or revenue, to any local authority. A grant made pursuant to this section will be (i) for such amount, and, (ii) paid on such conditions as may be determined by the relevant minister.
- 8.2 Section 1(1) of the Localism Act 2011 provides that a local authority has power to do anything that individuals generally may do. The Council has the power, therefore to accept and receive grant funding.
- 8.3 The Council should (i) comply with the terms of and conditions attached to the grant, and, (ii) complete any legal documentation which is required to give effect to the receipt and use of the said grant.
- 8.4 The grant funding will be managed in accordance with the Financial Procedure Rules (inter alia paragraph 4e.33 External Funding) contained in the Council's constitution.

9 Risk assessment

- 9.1 The grant the Council will receive will support cost of living intervention options for those residents most adversely affected. Not receiving the grants could pose an additional financial risk to the Council through additional service demand.

10 Procurement implications

- 10.1 There are no procurement implications identified.

11. Equalities and Human Rights implications / Public Sector Equality Duty

- 11.1 The grants have specific criteria in respect of which cohorts must be supported.

12 Environmental implications

- 12.1 There are no specific environmental implications arising from this report, although the development of all activities and initiatives will be mindful of HDC's target to be carbon neutral by 2030.

13 Other considerations

- 13.1 There are no direct crime and disorder implications. The use of all databases and other sources of information will ensure that GDPR and data protection legislation is fully complied with.