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| <b>REPORT TO:</b>        | Leader of South Holland District Council  |
| <b>DATE:</b>             | 16 <sup>th</sup> November 2021  |
| <b>SUBJECT:</b>          | HOUSEHOLD SUPPORT FUND  |
| <b>PURPOSE:</b>          | To accept the offer made by Lincolnshire County Council as part of the Department for Work and Pension's Household Support Fund and to establish support for our most vulnerable communities in Boston, East Lindsey and South Holland. |
| <b>KEY DECISION:</b>     | Yes   |
| <b>PORTFOLIO HOLDER:</b> | Leader of South Holland District Council Lord Porter  |
| <b>REPORT OF:</b>        | Assistant Director – Wellbeing and Community Leadership, Emily Spicer   |
| <b>REPORT AUTHOR:</b>    | Strategic Lead Prosperous Communities, Roxanne Warrick  |
| <b>WARD(S) AFFECTED:</b> | ALL   |
| <b>EXEMPT REPORT?</b>    | NO  |

## SUMMARY

This report outlines delivery of the new HOUSEHOLD SUPPORT FUND across the sovereign councils of Boston, East Lindsey and South Holland that make up the South & East Lincolnshire Councils Partnership.

Due to the urgent need to administer the funding to our communities, each council is asked to support the recommendations as provided within this report. Whilst funding will be allocated to each sovereign council and dispersed to households in need within that district, a single policy and scheme has developed across the South & East Lincolnshire Partnership to provide administrative efficiency and consistency in support of the most vulnerable in all our communities.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- To give delegated authority to the Deputy Chief Executive (Communities) who in consultation with the Leader and relevant Portfolio Holder be authorised to implement the policy in respect of administration of the funding.
- To develop a 'trusted referral' application route for professionals supporting vulnerable residents to apply for grants on behalf of residents.
- Payments will be made to utility suppliers and vouchers purchased for residents through a web-based platform 'Charis'. Charis is an established grants administrator of hardship funds for vulnerable households providing a web-based 'shop' that can be accessed to purchase food and utility vouchers.
- This scheme sits with Prosperous Communities team within the newly created Communities Department to support the S&ELCP.

## **REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Due to the urgent need to support struggling households with immediate needs this Winter, delegation is required to sign off policy and procedure outside of the committee process in order to successfully launch the local scheme on 1<sup>st</sup> December 2021.
- This is not a transactional grants scheme so should be outside of existing processes to ensure it is flexible to respond to immediate need. Officers working with people and communities have the relationships and trust with the third sector to deliver partnership approach.
- There will be no public facing application, but 'trusted referral' will ensure any household needing support will have the opportunity to receive this funding alongside any additional needs that are identified.

## **OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

- Not to accept the allocation of Household Support Fund and decline to deliver local scheme.
- Provision of a public facing online application form for eligibility assessment and direct payments into bank accounts through PSPS Revenue and Benefits.
- Public facing direct payments into bank accounts with applications assessed by 'community support' and payments processed by PSPS Revenue and Benefits.
- To deliver through other grant and voucher providers.

## **1. BACKGROUND**

- 1.1 £421 million has been made available in England to support vulnerable households across the country to help them with essentials over the winter period. This funding must be utilised by 31 March 2022 inclusive.

- 1.2 The new Household Support Fund will be distributed by councils in England to directly help those who need it most. The grant will be distributed through small payments to support vulnerable households meet daily needs such as food and utilities.
- 1.3 Whilst in two tier areas the funding will initially be allocated to County Councils, guidance specifically outlines expectation for County Councils to work with District Councils to provide support. This is to ensure the funding meets its objectives by identifying those most in need. The guidance sets out required collaboration with District Council and charitable organisations that have the local ties, knowledge and relationships that make them well placed to identify and help the most vulnerable residents.
- 1.4 The S&ELCP has been working with Lincolnshire County Council to develop and co-ordinate the scheme which is outlined in this report.

**2. HOUSEHOLD SUPPORT FUNDING ADMINISTRATION IN LINCOLNSHIRE**

- 2.1 £5,464,685.20 has been awarded to Lincolnshire County Council under Section 31 of the Local Government Act 2001, to administer the Household Support Fund and to provide assistance to households most in need across Lincolnshire.
- 2.2 Whilst the fund should primarily be used to support households in the most need with food and utility costs the fund may also be used to support households with other essentials costs. At least 50% of funding must be spent on households with children.
- 2.3 Lincolnshire County Council have advised that Children’s Services intend to fund food or vouchers for children and young people eligible for Free School Meals and Early Years Pupil Premium in non-term time between now and the end of the grants period. This will initially utilise 50% of the funding, with a review in the New Year to ensure sufficient funding is available.
- 2.4 For the remaining funding equating to £1,912,639.82, Lincolnshire County Council has offered each District an allocation of funding based on population and deprivation weighting provided by the Department of Work and Pensions. The percentage splits for each district are shown in **Table 1** below:

**Table 1 – Percentage splits for District Councils in Lincolnshire**

| District Council | %   |
|------------------|-----|
| Boston           | 10% |
| East Lindsey     | 24% |
| Lincoln          | 16% |
| North Kesteven   | 11% |
| South Holland    | 12% |
| South Kesteven   | 14% |
| West Lindsey     | 13% |

- 2.5 Provisional maximum allocations for each Council within the South & East Lincolnshire Council Partnership are shown in **Table 2** below:

**Table 2 – S&ELCP – Maximum Allocations for each Council**

| District Council | £          |
|------------------|------------|
| Boston           | 191,263.98 |
| East Lindsey     | 459,033.54 |

|               |            |
|---------------|------------|
| South Holland | 229,516.77 |
|---------------|------------|

- 2.6 Whilst each council will receive its allocation separately, one process will be utilised across the Partnership to ensure administration efficiencies and consistency of approach. The basic outline being our approach is based on:
- We are building on our **previous experience** of COVID-19 (lesson learnt and the fastest way to get support out to our communities whilst ensuring good governance for government returns);
  - Ensuring our scheme has as much **flexibility** as possible for us to support the most vulnerable in our communities over Winter; and
  - Using our **support networks and partners** to support us and in turn support the most vulnerable in our communities.
- 2.7 The ‘trusted referrer’ model has been used successfully in Lincolnshire throughout the pandemic. It recognises that that across the county there are organisations already assessing the needs of vulnerable residents and facilitating support for them.
- 2.8 Countywide partners that will be invited to make applications on behalf of residents:
- The Department of Work and Pensions
  - Citizens Advice
  - Carer’s First
  - Wellbeing Lincs
  - Neighbourhood Teams (multi-disciplinary Health & Social Care)
  - YMCA Lincolnshire / Community Lincs
  - Lincolnshire Community & Voluntary Service (social-prescribers)
  - Local referral partners will include (but not be limited to):
    - Internal District Council Services
    - PSPS Revenues & Benefits Service
    - Established Community Larders
- 2.9 To ensure a broad range of households are supported, there is no restrictive eligibility. Professionals making referrals will be asked to confirm they are satisfied resident needs financial support for household essentials. Reasons for need could arise from (but not be restricted to):
- Poor physical or mental health
  - Unmanageable debt
  - Bereavement
  - Relationship breakdown
  - Struggling to pay utility bills
  - Victim of domestic abuse
  - Recently homeless / sleeping rough
- 2.10 Household Support Fund eligibility is not restricted to households in receipt of benefits and is not conditional on employment or immigration status.

### 3. CONCLUSION

- 3.1 The Household Support Fund will provide valuable help to vulnerable households this Winter. Small payments received through this funding will meet daily needs such as food and utilities.
- 3.2 The proposed referral process will ensure as many vulnerable households as possible can be identified and supported. Trusted referral partners will ensure the application is as easy as possible whilst identifying additional needs the household may need support for.

#### **4. EXPECTED BENEFITS TO THE PARTNERSHIP**

- 4.1 The following benefits are anticipated through acceptance of the funding:
- That the delivery of a comprehensive administration scheme can commence across the South & East Councils Partnership.
  - That vulnerable households are identified utilising local knowledge and supported through the process by trusted referral partners.
  - That vulnerable households will be supported throughout the Winter.
  - That the utilisation of trusted referral partners will enable wider support to be provided to vulnerable households over and above the Household Support funding application.

#### **5. IMPLICATIONS**

#### **6. SOUTH AND EAST LINCOLNSHIRE COUNCILS PARTNERSHIP**

- 6.1 Managing the Household Support Fund as a Partnership approach will ensure our previous experience of grant administration is utilised to its fullest, that our local knowledge of our most vulnerable communities is identified, and processing efficiencies are realised.

#### **7. CORPORATE PRIORITIES**

- 7.1 The following Corporate Priorities are supported through the administration of the Household Support Fund:

Boston Borough Council – ‘Priority 1 - People Focused’

East Lindsey District Council – ‘Maximise health and active lives’

South Holland District Council – ‘Your health and well being’

#### **8. STAFFING**

- 8.1 This fund will cover the costs of staffing in order to support efficient and effective distribution of funds to the most vulnerable in our communities.

#### **9. CONSTITUTIONAL AND LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 9.1 Due to the urgency of the administration of the Household Support Fund this decision is made in special urgency with the agreement of the Chairman of Scrutiny.

#### **10. DATA PROTECTION**

10. All personal data will be administered following data protection legislation.

#### **11. FINANCIAL**

- 11.1 Provisional maximum allocations for each Council within the South & East Lincolnshire Council Partnership are shown in **Table 3** below:

**Table 3 – S&ELCP – Maximum Allocations for each Council**

| District Council | £          |
|------------------|------------|
| Boston           | 191,263.98 |
| East Lindsey     | 459,033.54 |
| South Holland    | 229,516.77 |

- 11.2 The funding must be utilised by 31<sup>st</sup> March 2022 and will be paid in arrears of spending. Payments and awards made by Districts will be submitted monthly from the end of December. Standard returns template will be submitted splitting the spend by household (children or non-children) and type of essential awarded.
- 11.3 This will help track countywide spending to date and whether other options should be explored to ensure overall grant spent.

Reimbursement of District spend will be made:

- January (for spend up to end of December)
- March (spend January to end of Feb)
- April (spend for March)

## **12. RISK MANAGEMENT**

- 12.1 By accepting the grant allocations through special urgency, the administration of the funding can commence. This will ensure the funding can be utilised by vulnerable households without delay whilst mitigating against the risk of claw back should any funding be unused.

## **13. STAKEHOLDER / CONSULTATION / TIMESCALES**

- 13.1 All key stakeholders including trusted referral partners will be contacted as part of the development of this funding administration.

## **14. REPUTATION**

- 14.1 A special urgency decision will ensure the funding is accepted in readiness for the processing of applications by 1<sup>st</sup> December 2021. This will positively impact on reputation by ensuring the South and East Lincolnshire Councils Partnership is supporting households in need as soon as practicable.

## **15. CONTRACTS**

- 15.1 All appropriate procurement exemption notices have been applied in line with the sovereign council's individual constitutions.

## **16. CRIME AND DISORDER**

- 16.1 It is in the report authors opinion that there are no crime and disorder implications associated with accepting this grant funding.

## **17. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY/ HUMAN RIGHTS/ SAFEGUARDING**

17.1 The scheme is being developed with regard to the legislative duties of Equality Act 2010. Grants will available to all residents regardless of their age, disability, gender, marital status, race, religion, sex or sexual orientation.

## 18. HEALTH AND WELL BEING

18.1 The Household Support Fund will be available to help residents with poor physical or mental health. Support with household essentials will alleviate poor health related financial stress and fuel poverty.

## 19. CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

19.1 It is in the report authors opinion that there are no climate change and environmental implications associated with accepting this grant funding.

## 20. ACRONYMS

20.1 None

| <b>BACKGROUND PAPERS</b>  |   |
|---|---|
| Background papers used in the production of this report are listed below: - |   |
| <b>Document title</b>   | <b>Where the document can be viewed</b>   |
| Household Support Fund Guidance   | <a href="https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/household-support-fund-guidance-for-local-councils">https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/household-support-fund-guidance-for-local-councils</a> |

| <b>REPORT APPROVAL</b>    |  |
|---------------------------|--|
| Report author:            | Roxanne Warrick, Strategic Lead Prosperous Communities, Roxanne.warrick@e-lindsey.gov.uk   |
| Signed off by:            | Emily Spicer, Assistant Director – Wellbeing and Community Leadership<br><br>Nathan Elvery, Deputy Chief Executive - Communities |
| Approved for publication: | Leader of the Council  |