

North Yorkshire Council

Report to Councillor David Chance, Executive Member for Corporate Services

16 May 2023

Household Support Fund (April 2023 – March 2024)

1.0 Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 To set out, and seek approval for, the deployment of a fourth Household Support Fund (HSF) allocation (1 April 2023 – 31 March 2024) in order to provide crisis support to vulnerable households in most need of support, and to help with significantly rising living costs over the next 12 months.
- 1.2 This is further to a report considered on 23 March 2023, outlining the initial deployment of HSF funds for North Yorkshire Local Assistance Fund (NYLAF).

2.0 Background

- 2.1 £842m has been made available to County Councils and Unitary Authorities in England to support those most in need and to help with global inflationary challenges and the significantly rising cost of living via the Household Support Fund. HSF should be used to support households in the most need; particularly those who may not be eligible for other support government that has been made available but who are nevertheless in need and who require crisis support. This includes the Cost of Living Payments and energy support being provided in 2023/24 set out on 17 November 2022. The HSF is however intended to cover a wide range of low-income households in need, including families with children of all ages, pensioners, unpaid carers, care leavers and disabled people.
- 2.2 The expectation is that HSF should be primarily used to support households in the most need with the costs of energy, however it can also be used to support households with the cost of food and water bills, essential costs related to those items, and with wider essential costs.
- 2.3 Funding allocations are provided under section 31 of the Local Government Act 2003. Although this is an extension to the original HSF, it is a new grant subject to its own grant conditions. This scheme will however be delivered over a 12-month period, unlike previous phases, which have been for 6 months.
- 2.4 North Yorkshire Council will receive an allocation of £7,075,100. The timing of the announcement and the public expectation that the scheme will be available for applications, means that prompt action is necessary to deliver the scheme as soon as possible.

- 2.5 In guidance received from DWP, the local authority has flexibility to determine eligibility in their area and to channel support through a variety of routes, for example through vouchers, direct provision or via third party suppliers. At least part of the scheme must be operated on an application basis.
- 2.6 Although this is considered an extension to the HSF scheme, it is a new grant subject to its own conditions. Support should be targeted at the following households:
- i. Those who may not be eligible for government support that has been made available but who are in need. This includes the DWP Cost of Living Payments set out on 17 November 2022. This may include, but is not limited to, people who are entitled to but not claiming qualifying benefits, people who are claiming Housing Benefit (HB) only, and people who begin a claim or return to payment of a benefit after the relevant qualifying date.
 - ii. Those who are vulnerable to rising prices even though they are supported through these schemes, for example large families or single-income families.
 - iii. Those from a range of low-income households in need including families with children of all ages, pensioners, unpaid carers, care leavers and disabled people.
 - iv. Disabled people and carers in particular may be facing acute challenges due to the disproportionate impact that rising costs bring for these cohorts of the population.
- 2.7 Eligible expenditure includes:
- Energy and water. The fund should primarily be used to support energy bills for any form of fuel that is used for the purpose of domestic heating, cooking, or lighting, including oil or portable gas cylinders. It can also be used to support water bills including for drinking, washing, cooking, as well as for sanitary purposes and sewerage.
 - Food. The fund can be used to provide support with food, whether in kind or through vouchers or cash.
 - Essentials linked to energy and water. The fund can be used to provide support with essentials linked to energy and water (for example period products, warm clothing, soap, blankets, the purchase of equipment such as fridges, freezers, ovens, slow cookers), in recognition that a range of costs may arise which directly affect a household's ability to afford or access energy, food and water. This may also include supporting households on low incomes to repair or replace white goods and appliances with more energy efficient ones, or to invest in simple energy efficiency measures which will pay back quickly, such as insulating a hot water tank, fitting draft excluders to a front door, or replacing inefficient lightbulbs or white goods. The intention of this is to provide sustainable support which could result in both immediate and long-lasting savings for the household.
 - Wider essentials. The fund can be used to support wider essential needs not linked to energy and water should Authorities consider this appropriate in their area. These may include, but are not limited to, support with other bills including broadband or phone bills, clothing, and essential transport-related costs such as repairing a car, buying a bicycle, or paying for fuel. This list is not exhaustive.

- Advice services. HSF may be used to provide supplementary advice services to award recipients, including debt and benefit advice, where this is considered appropriate and where it complements practical, crisis support for households available through the fund. It is expected that where funded, that a significant proportion of this will be through signposting to existing advice services funded through other routes, such as the Help to Claim scheme which supports those making a claim to Universal Credit.
- Housing costs. In exceptional cases of genuine emergency, where existing housing support schemes do not meet exceptional need, the fund can be used to support housing costs. Where eligible, ongoing housing support for rent must be provided through the Housing cost element of Universal Credit (UC) and Housing Benefit (HB) rather than the fund. In addition, eligibility for Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs) must first be considered before emergency housing support is offered through the fund. The authority must also first consider whether the claimant is at statutory risk of homelessness and therefore owed a duty of support through the Homelessness Prevention Grant (HPG).
- In exceptional cases of genuine emergency, households in receipt of HB, UC, or DHPs can still receive housing cost support through the fund if it is deemed necessary by their authority. However, the fund should not be used to provide housing support on an ongoing basis or to support unsustainable tenancies.
- Individuals in receipt of some other form of housing support could still qualify for the other elements of the fund, such as food, energy, water, essentials linked to energy and water and wider essentials.
- The fund cannot be used to provide mortgage support, though homeowners could still qualify for the other elements of the fund (such as energy, food, water, essentials linked to energy and water and wider essentials).
- The fund can exceptionally and in genuine emergency be used to provide support for historic rent arrears built up prior to an existing benefit claim for households already in receipt of UC and HB. This is because these arrears are excluded from the criteria for DHPs. However, support with rent arrears is not the primary intent of the fund and should not be the focus of spend.
- Reasonable administrative costs for administering the fund.

2.8 Local authorities are required to develop a 'local delivery framework' to enable them to distribute grant funding that best supports households most in need. This must be underpinned by a clear rationale or documented policy / framework outlining their approach including how they are defining eligibility and how households access the scheme. Local authorities have the ability to deliver the scheme through a variety of routes including provision of vouchers to households, making direct provision of food, or issuing grants to third parties. Authorities must operate an application-based service for emergency support as part of their HSF scheme.

2.9 Where a local authority chooses to use third party organisations, this should be done on an objectively fair, transparent and non-discriminatory basis, having regard to the time available to deliver the scheme.

- 2.10 The scheme requires local authorities to use a wide range of data and sources of information including engagement with third party organisations, to identify and provide support to a broad cross section of vulnerable households in their area. In doing so, local authorities should particularly consider how they can prevent escalation of problems and support those vulnerable households who are ineligible for other government support with the cost of living. Eligibility cannot be conditional on being employed or self-employed, or directly linked to a loss of earnings from employment or self-employment. Authorities should ensure that they consider the needs of various households including families with children of all ages, pensioners, unpaid carers, care leavers and disabled people.
- 2.11 Local authorities can provide a basic safety net of support to an individual, regardless of their immigration status, if there is a genuine care need that does not arise solely from destitution.
- 2.12 Local authorities can proactively identify households who may benefit and must also operate an application process for emergency support as part of the scheme. There is no requirement for a means test or to conduct a benefit check unless this forms part of the local eligibility criteria. However, in relation to housing costs, local authorities must establish whether other forms of support are available to the household, such as Discretionary Housing Payments.
- 2.13 The local authority will be asked to report and manage spend in relation to the conditions set out above. Information will, however, be requested from DWP on which groups have benefitted from grants, administrative costs and payment assurance, alongside reporting delivery plan progress. Management information provided to DWP in June, September and December 2023 and March 2024 must be copied to the Section 151 officer to provide assurance on validation of funding spend.
- 2.14 The Delivery Plan detailing the proposed deployment of HSF in North Yorkshire, which is to be submitted to DWP by 17 May 2023, must be endorsed and signed off by the Section 151 Officer and Executive Member for Corporate Services.

3.0 Local Eligibility Framework and Approach

- 3.1 The North Yorkshire eligibility framework and approach is intended to recognise the current cost of living pressures including inflationary pressures on essential goods and services in particular gas, electricity and other fuel costs. Whilst the proposed framework acknowledges these pressures, it is not the intention to replicate any other scheme and to complement the national cost of living support programme.
- 3.2 Evaluation of the previous three phases has been built into the development of the phase 4 approach; this encompasses a customer engagement exercise undertaken in April 2023 (attached at **Appendix A**). A letter and paper survey were distributed to 1,000 households that benefitted from direct award support in the third phase of HSF in order to understand the customer experience. The main findings from the 309 respondents are as follows:

- 96% of respondents rated their experience of using HSF as good or very good.
- Although 29% of people claimed without any support, 30% needed help from family, 14% got help from a library and 8% at a council office.
- 50% wouldn't change anything, and free text responses indicated that the shopping voucher was a good mechanism for providing direct support to households.

3.3 The proposed North Yorkshire eligibility framework and approach offers different ways of providing support to households who may be in need. The aim is to provide targeted support that is delivered both effectively and efficiently, taking account of varying personal circumstances. The proposed framework and approach has been developed in consultation with Revenues and Benefits teams in North Yorkshire, and drawing upon the experience and insight gained from the delivery of the previous three phases of HSF as outlined in Section 3.2.

3.3.1 Proactive identification of households using eligibility criteria

- Approximately 3,700 households who are in receipt of Housing Benefit but did not qualify for first and second Cost of Living payments in 2023/24. The proposed eligibility windows will mirror the eligibility windows for the first two of three Cost of Living payments (first one paid in April 2023, the second autumn payment date has yet to be confirmed by DWP) which will be paid to people in receipt of Universal Credit, Income Support, Pension Credit, income-based Jobseekers Allowance (JSA), income-related Employment and Support Allowance (ESA), Child Tax Credit and Working Tax Credit. There will be two eligibility windows through which identified eligible households will receive a voucher of £450. Should a household be eligible in both windows, they will receive a total voucher value of £900 over the total funding period.
- Approximately 22,000 households who are in receipt of maximum means tested council tax support or reduction. There will be two eligibility cut off dates (to be confirmed) through which identified eligible households will receive a voucher of £55. Should a household be eligible at both cut off dates, they will receive a total voucher value of £110 over the total funding period.

Based on data supplied by Revenues and Benefits teams, it is proposed that the above eligible households will be contacted directly by post over two payment windows to advise them how to claim their voucher. Households which are eligible in both categories as outlined in Section 3.3.1 will only receive one award per eligibility window.

Given the focus in the DWP guidance on supporting those who may not have been awarded Cost of Living payment support due to exceptional circumstances, it is proposed to implement an application process to

complement the direct awards element of the scheme whilst it is live in summer and winter. This will be exclusively for:

- Exceptional circumstances which led to households not receiving a low-income benefit or tax credit Cost of Living payment for reasons such as benefit processing delays, temporarily falling out of benefit during the eligibility window etc. One proposed payment of £450, unless the household has already been awarded an HSF direct award voucher for being in receipt of maximum CTR, in which case, they will receive £395.
- Exceptional circumstances which led to individuals not being included as being in receipt of maximum council tax support or reduction on two specified dates (to be confirmed), for example relocating at the time of the data cut and therefore temporarily falling out of the CTR scheme, delays to processing their CTR claim which were outside of the household's control etc. A proposed payment of £55. Households who have already received a voucher for £450 will not be eligible for an additional £55 voucher.

It is proposed at this stage, that the application and voucher award process for the exceptional circumstances elements will be hosted by Family Fund Business Services (FFBS) via a dedicated portal set up on the Flexigrant system to ensure cases are accurately managed and monitored in line with DWP guidelines. As part of this process, applications will be reviewed and assessed by the Revenues and Benefits teams utilising a robust eligibility criterion, ensuring that comprehensive evidence is provided by the household to validate the exceptional circumstances they have outlined. Successful applicants will then be awarded their voucher via email by FFBS. The decision of the Council will be final with no appeals process.

It is proposed that a total of c£5.7million is allocated to the entirety of the direct awards element of the scheme.

It is proposed that vouchers will be distributed in summer and winter of 2023/24, with the detailed timetable to be agreed by the Assistant Director for Customer, Revenues and Benefits.

It is proposed that the vouchers will be supermarket vouchers, redeemable at a number of national supermarket chains, with the recipient being able to choose the national supermarket chain. Arrangements will be in place (including through libraries and customer service access points) to ensure households who need additional help to access or utilise vouchers are able to do so. As in previous rounds, consideration has been given to other ways of distributing the awards, but supermarket vouchers are the most cost-effective and efficient method of distribution available at short notice to the Council.

3.3.2 Food Banks – In the previous phases of Household Support Fund, up to 16 voluntary sector food bank operators and other food projects were supported, to ensure increased capacity was available in the free food supply infrastructure

across the county. Based on this learning, it is proposed that two rounds of grants are once again made available in summer and winter 2023, the size of which will be based on the size of the operator and their local offer. In total, it is proposed to award up to £360K in total to voluntary sector food bank providers and projects.

3.3.3 Energy Support in previous rounds has been administered by Citizens Advice through the Warm and Well Public Health funded contract; this had a particular focus on the delivery of a fuel voucher scheme to households in greatest need, including those who use oil or solid fuel for heating. This element of support will be subject to a procurement exercise with a supplier anticipated to be in place by late summer 2023; it is proposed that a grant of £500K including reasonable staffing costs is made available to launch and deliver this fund over the winter until 31 March 2024.

3.3.4 North Yorkshire Local Assistance fund (NYLAF) is the North Yorkshire Council managed scheme that provides support for vulnerable people including emergency food vouchers and utility top-ups. NYLAF is already experiencing increased demand from households who are struggling to buy food, pay essential utility bills or meet other essential living costs. It is proposed to allocate a total of £400K (inclusive of the £60K agreed on 23 March 2023) to NYLAF to help meet the increased demand and to enable the maximum entitlement of four food and / or utility applications in a 12-month rolling period to continue until 31 March 2024.

3.4 Funding allocations will continue to be monitored throughout the grant period; with any residual funding across the support streams to be re-allocated as required to meet demand. It is proposed that should this be required, this decision can be undertaken by the Assistant Director for Customer, Revenues and Benefits.

4.0 Financial Implications

4.1 The Household Support Fund is funded by a Section 31 grant from the Department for Work and Pensions and ring-fenced to be spent in line with the terms and conditions set out in the Grant Determination. Payment of the grant will be in arrears:

- First payment: after the submission of an MI return in July 2023.
- Second payment: after the submission of an MI return in October 2023.
- Third payment: after the submission of an MI return in January 2024.
- Final payment: following the submission of the final MI return and delivery plan record at the end of the grant period in April 2024.

4.2 Payments by DWP to the local authority are dependent on the submission of MI returns and they must be endorsed by the Section 151 officer.

- 4.3 As with any welfare payment to vulnerable recipients, there is a risk of fraud. Risk management implications are discussed in Section 8.0 of this report.
- 4.4 The total grant allocation for North Yorkshire is £7,075,100 and covers the period from 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024. All funds should be spent or committed by 31 March 2024, with no carry forward for future usage permitted. It is however acceptable for vouchers that have been purchased and delivered to households before the end of HSF to be spent shortly thereafter.
- 4.5 Based on financial modelling, indicative allocations are:

Part	Description	Total
(a)	Payments based on eligibility criteria	£5,700K
(b)	Food Bank Operators	£360K
(c)	Energy Support	£500K
(d)	NYLAF	£400K
(e)	Management (including postage & comms)	£115K
TOTAL		£7,075K

- 4.6 Although not expected, any overspend incurred will be the responsibility of the Council. In the first three rounds of HSF, there has been an underspend on the direct award element of the scheme, resulting in the reallocation of funds to the broader HSF support strands.
- 4.7 A light-touch evaluation of the scheme will be undertaken in March 2024 to support the submission of the final MI return to DWP.

5.0 Legal Implications

- 5.1 This matter requires an urgent decision by the decision taker, and cannot reasonably be deferred, to enable the timely consideration and implementation of this matter and to meet Government deadlines for a delivery plan to be submitted. It has been agreed that the decision proposed is reasonable under the circumstances and to it being treated as a matter of urgency (where any delay likely to be caused by the call in process would seriously prejudice the Council's or the public interest). Therefore the call-in procedure should therefore not apply to the decision. See [Issue details - Household Support Fund \(Phase 4\) | North Yorkshire Council](#).

6.0 Equalities Implications

- 6.1 The Department for Work and Pensions has undertaken an Equality Impact Assessment on the national scheme. For the local implementation of the scheme in North Yorkshire, as identified in the attached Equality Impact Screening Form

(attached at **Appendix B**), there is not an adverse impact on any protected characteristics.

- 6.2 In this phase, it is mandatory for Authorities to make their plans on how to deliver the scheme public, including any application-based support available. North Yorkshire Council will continue to have a dedicated webpage for the fund and consider inclusive and accessible ways to advertise the scheme through a dedicated communications plan.

7.0 Environmental Implications

- 7.1 There are no significant environmental implications arising from this report (see attached Initial Climate Change Impact Assessment Form attached at **Appendix C**).

8.0 Risk Management Implications

- 8.1 The Household Support Fund is not a direct replacement for other policy decisions taken by national government and/or the local authority. There are a number of known and acknowledged pressures facing households. Whilst a significant proportion of the funding will be allocated based on eligibility criteria/data held by the local authority, it is anticipated that there will be demand for additional applications for support either from (i) households in receipt of the direct award where further support is requested, or (ii) from households who are facing pressures that are not identified by the eligibility criteria/data.

- 8.2 Given the profile and visibility of this fund, there is a tight turnaround for the local authority to deliver the scheme with high levels of public expectation.

- 8.3 Measures will be used to minimise the chance of fraudulent and multiple applications; there are two verification steps within the direct award stage to ensure monies are not distributed to ineligible households as well as other issues, such as multiple requests per households. In conjunction with Veritau, Officers from across the Council will convene a weekly HSF Fraud Investigation Panel whilst the direct award element of the scheme is live to review and examine any potential fraud cases. Fraud cases have been minimal in previous rounds of HSF.

9.0 Recommendation

- 9.1 It is recommended that Executive Member for Corporate Services agrees the proposed local eligibility framework and approach for the fourth phase of Household Support Fund as set out above, which will inform the Delivery Plan submitted to DWP on 17 May 2023.

Report Authors

Margaret Wallace - Assistant Director Customer, Revenues and Benefits

Adele Wilson-Hope – Stronger Communities Delivery Manager

Appendix A – HSF Customer Voice Survey Report

Appendix B – Equality Impact Screening Form

Appendix C - Initial Climate Change Impact Assessment Form

Household Support Fund - customer voice survey results

The purpose of the survey was to understand what worked well and what we could do differently ahead of the fourth phase of the Household Support Fund.

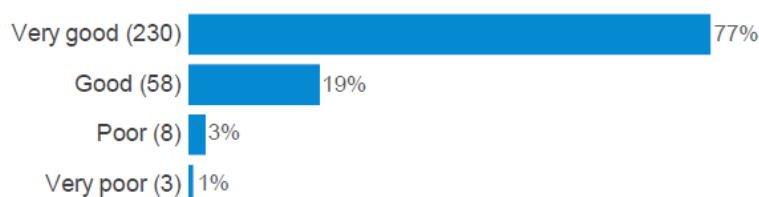
A letter and paper survey, which included a web link offering people the option to take part online, was sent to 1,000 Household Support Fund phase three direct award recipients with a pre-paid return envelope.

309 respondents completed the survey. The data sample of 1,000 people was selected to proportionately represent phase three geography and demographics.

Overall experience

96% of respondents rated their experience of using the Household Support Fund as **very good or good**. 77% rated their experience as being very good and 19% good.

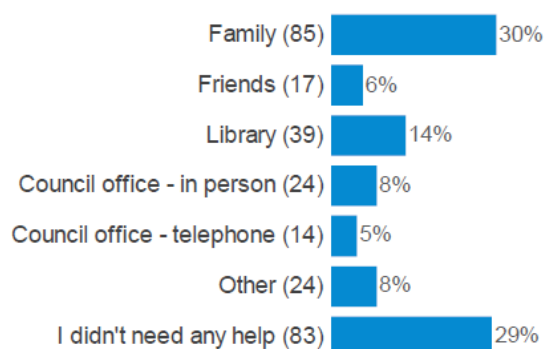
How would you rate your experience of claiming and using the Household Support Fund e-voucher payment? (How would you rate your experience of claiming and using ...)



Getting help and support to redeem

Although 29% of people claimed without any support, 30% needed help from family, 14% got help from a library and 8% at a council office.

Did you get any help to claim the Household Support Fund? If so, who from?



Free text responses - what worked well?

In answering the question 'Based on your experience, what do you think worked well?' people gave answers that included the following themes:

Figures in brackets are the number of people who responded out of 309.

- **Everything (40)**
- **Worked well – general (27)**
- **Easy – claiming the voucher (37)**
- **Easy – spending the voucher (26)**
- Choice of supermarkets (14)
- Choice of what to spend the voucher on (7)
- Splitting between supermarkets (4)
- Not having to spend the voucher all at once (4)
- Using a mobile phone to spend the voucher (15)
- Offset cost of energy (7)
- **Helped reduce the stress of financial pressure (59)**
- Discreet – no stigma (4)
- Help to redeem – council offices (7)
- Help to redeem – family and friends (11)
- Help to redeem – libraries (13)
- Clear information (4)
- Automatic eligibility (2)
- Online delivery (3)

Highlights - 13% of respondents told us that everything worked well. 12% gave the ease of redemption as a specific example. 19% told us that what worked well for them was reducing the stress of financial pressure.

Customer responses

"It was great help with household bills and so saved us having to cut down drastically and with so many getting this help, no one was looked down on and made to feel awkward. I certainly appreciate it very much, thank you."

“I think it worked well and from the bottom of my heart I would like to thank you. I am saving my latest E Vouchers for XMAS. Thank you.”

“The fact that the store accepted the e-voucher without any sign of indignation or alerting any embarrassment what so ever. As long as I knew my o/s balance and kept within that parameter then I was ok! Aldi staff were phenomenal- they highlighted the o/s balance at the bottom of the receipt every time- they were all friendly.”

“I found it very easy to use my e-voucher. Very much appreciated the voucher to spend at the supermarket. I think giving cash sometimes is a bad thing as some people don't spend it on food heating etc.”

“The letter set out what to do in a clear manner and the process as a whole was easy.”

Free text responses - what could we have done differently?

In answering the question ‘Is there anything we could have done differently?’ people gave answers that included the following themes:

- **Nothing (154)**
- **Higher amount – general (5)**
- Higher amount – family (1)
- Higher amount – disabled (2)
- Higher amount – single (1)
- **Give cash or pay direct to bank account (4)**
- **More choice of local retailers (9)**
- Include the Co-op (1)
- More online shopping options (4)
- Make the process easier (2)
- Give people longer to redeem (1)
- Spread the payments throughout the year (1)
- **Send a voucher direct through the post (11)**
- Refer people to other help and support (1)
- Larger print size (1)
- More information about how to claim (1)
- More information about which supermarkets offer online (1)
- More accessible for older people (1)

Highlights - although people made some suggestions, **50% of respondents wouldn't change anything**. Only 1% suggested that cash or direct payment to bank accounts would be preferable. 3% of respondents suggested that there should be more choice of local retailers, with one specific request for the Co-Op. **Only 2% of respondents suggested a higher amount.**

Customer responses

“I would have preferred cash because I was limited to Morrisons which isn't cheap and £10 in a taxi there and back.”

“No. We were delighted with the help voucher. no need for a change.”

“It would have been better for us if the voucher could have been posted out - but realise this has cost implications and may not be practical.”

“I would like to say thank you for this paperwork and so not assuming all of us can text and email, as I can't and so many services send me texts and I don't know how to reply.”

“Paid us with money as it is very humiliating having to use a voucher.”

“Made it available to spend at more supermarkets or stores. some local places would have been helpful instead of having a 20 mile round trip. could not use at local supermarket.”

“No just keep what you're doing it works very well.”

Free text responses - other suggestions

Highlights - in answering the question 'Do you have any other suggestions for the fourth phase of the Household Support Fund?' **40% of respondents suggested that we keep it how it is. 3% said we should keep the option of getting help to redeem the vouchers.**

Other suggestions include:

- Help with energy payments (7)
- Sending vouchers direct in the post (3)
- Make the amounts equal (2)
- Target people who missed out on other Government support (1)
- Help with council tax (1)
- Larger print on letters (1)
- Give people longer to redeem (1)

Customer responses

“I just hope the people who received the voucher used it well and were able to help look after themselves properly.”

“As everything is continuing to rise dramatically perhaps the amount could reflect this.”

“I am extremely grateful for the help you have given me at this difficult time so whatever you decide will be appreciated.”

“To make whatever help is given, spendable at more stores or food retailers, whilst retaining the way its spent (i.e. on food or necessary household items like necessary toiletries), so its spent appropriately. it took away the daily worry of "what can I afford to eat today". I spent all the vouchers on lots of store cupboard staples, so had food in my cupboards and didn't worry about being hungry. I am very grateful for this.”

“No, I don't think I have. Everything seemed very clear and easy to understand.”

“Pay as cash so we can sort our own bills the best way without been embarrassed.”

“Yes a bit more money would be good. I sit here in the cold, I can’t keep up with the gas meter so I just don’t put it on if I can really try not to put it on. I just put a coat on to keep warm. Did get help which I was very happy to get help from you.”

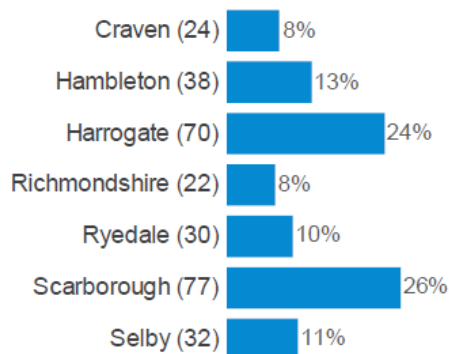
“I believe that giving cash is better because people are struggling to buy food.”

“No, I think the vouchers was a good idea as better than money going in people’s accounts and spent on the wrong things.”

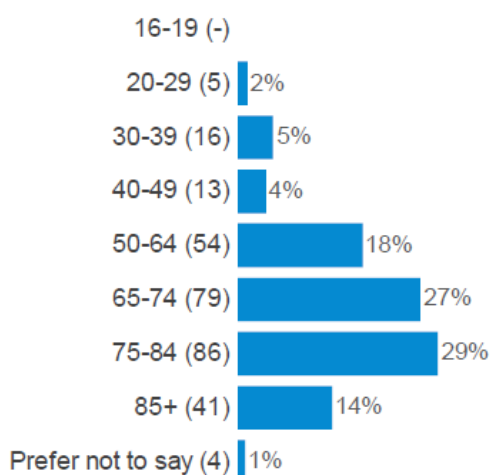
“Make one of the voucher options to be a donation to the local food bank, either a partial amount or the whole amount, I used some of my voucher to purchase items for a food bank, it would have been easier to be able to donate this directly.”

Information about repondants

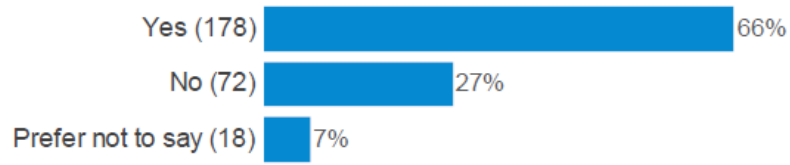
Which part of North Yorkshire do you live in?



What is your age group?



Do you consider yourself to be a disabled person or to have a long-term, limiting condition?



Equality impact assessment (EIA) form: evidencing paying due regard to protected characteristics

Household Support Fund (Phase 4)

If you would like this information in another language or format such as Braille, large print or audio, please contact the Communications Unit on 01609 53 2013 or email communications@northyorks.gov.uk.



যদি আপনি এই ডকুমেন্ট অন্য ভাষায় বা ফরমেটে চান, তাহলে দয়া করে আমাদেরকে বলুন।

如欲索取以另一語文印製或另一格式製作的資料，請與我們聯絡。

اگر آپ کو معلومات کسی دیگر زبان یا دیگر شکل میں درکار ہوں تو برائے مہربانی ہم سے پوچھئے۔

Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs) are public documents. EIAs accompanying reports going to Councillors for decisions are published with the committee papers on our website and are available in hard copy at the relevant meeting. To help people to find completed EIAs we also publish them in the Equality and Diversity section of our website. This will help people to see for themselves how we have paid due regard in order to meet statutory requirements.

Name of Directorate and Service Area	Central Services
Lead Officer and contact details	Margaret Wallace margaret.wallace@northyorks.gov.uk
Names and roles of other people involved in carrying out the EIA	Adele Wilson-Hope
How will you pay due regard? e.g. working group, individual officer	HSF Project Board
When did the due regard process start?	1 October 2022

Section 1. Please describe briefly what this EIA is about.

£842m has been made available to County Councils and Unitary Authorities in England to support those most in need and to help with global inflationary challenges and the significantly rising cost of living via the Household Support Fund. HSF should be used to support households in the most need; particularly those who may not be eligible for the other support government that has been made available but who are nevertheless in need and who require crisis support. This includes the Cost-of-Living Payments and energy support being provided in 2023/24 set out on 17 November 2022. The HSF is however intended to cover a wide range of low-income households in need, including families with children of all ages, pensioners, unpaid carers, care leavers and disabled people.

The expectation is that HSF should be primarily used to support households in the most need with the costs of energy, however it can also be used to support households with the cost of food and water bills, essential costs related to those items, and with wider essential costs.

North Yorkshire Council will receive an allocation of £7,075,100. The timing of the announcement and the public expectation that the scheme will be available for applications, means that prompt action is necessary to deliver the scheme as soon as possible.

Section 2. Why is this being proposed? What are the aims? What does the authority hope to achieve by it? (e.g. to save money, meet increased demand, do things in a better way.)

Support should be targeted at the following households:

- Those who may not be eligible for government support that has been made available but who are in need. This includes the DWP Cost of Living Payments set out on 17 November 2022. This may include, but is not limited to, people who are entitled to but not claiming qualifying benefits, people who are claiming Housing Benefit (HB) only, and people who begin a claim or return to payment of a benefit after the relevant qualifying date.
- Those who are vulnerable to rising prices even though they are supported through these schemes, for example large families or single-income families.
- Those from a range of low-income households in need including families with children of all ages, pensioners, unpaid carers, care leavers and disabled people.
- Disabled people and carers in particular may be facing acute challenges due to the disproportionate impact that rising costs bring for these cohorts of the population.

Eligible expenditure includes:

- Energy and water. The fund should primarily be used to support energy bills for any form of fuel that is used for the purpose of domestic heating, cooking, or lighting, including oil or portable gas cylinders. It can also be used to support water bills including for drinking, washing, cooking, as well as for sanitary purposes and sewerage.
- Food. The fund can be used to provide support with food, whether in kind or through vouchers or cash.

- Essentials linked to energy and water. The fund can be used to provide support with essentials linked to energy and water (for example period products, warm clothing, soap, blankets, the purchase of equipment such as fridges, freezers, ovens, slow cookers), in recognition that a range of costs may arise which directly affect a household's ability to afford or access energy, food and water. This may also include supporting households on low incomes to repair or replace white goods and appliances with more energy efficient ones, or to invest in simple energy efficiency measures which will pay back quickly, such as insulating a hot water tank, fitting draft excluders to a front door, or replacing inefficient lightbulbs or white goods. The intention of this is to provide sustainable support which could result in both immediate and long-lasting savings for the household.
- Wider essentials. The fund can be used to support wider essential needs not linked to energy and water should Authorities consider this appropriate in their area. These may include, but are not limited to, support with other bills including broadband or phone bills, clothing, and essential transport-related costs such as repairing a car, buying a bicycle, or paying for fuel. This list is not exhaustive.
- Advice services. HSF may be used to provide supplementary advice services to award recipients, including debt and benefit advice, where this is considered appropriate and where it complements practical, crisis support for households available through the fund. It is expected that where funded, that a significant proportion of this will be through signposting to existing advice services funded through other routes, such as the Help to Claim scheme which supports those making a claim to Universal Credit.
- Housing costs. In exceptional cases of genuine emergency, where existing housing support schemes do not meet exceptional need, the fund can be used to support housing costs. Where eligible, ongoing housing support for rent must be provided through the Housing cost element of Universal Credit (UC) and Housing Benefit (HB) rather than the fund. In addition, eligibility for Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs) must first be considered before emergency housing support is offered through the fund. The authority must also first consider whether the claimant is at statutory risk of homelessness and therefore owed a duty of support through the Homelessness Prevention Grant (HPG).
- In exceptional cases of genuine emergency, households in receipt of HB, UC, or DHPs can still receive housing cost support through the fund if it is deemed necessary by their authority. However, the fund should not be used to provide housing support on an ongoing basis or to support unsustainable tenancies.
- Individuals in receipt of some other form of housing support could still qualify for the other elements of the fund, such as food, energy, water, essentials linked to energy and water and wider essentials.
- The fund cannot be used to provide mortgage support, though homeowners could still qualify for the other elements of the fund (such as energy, food, water, essentials linked to energy and water and wider essentials).
- The fund can exceptionally and in genuine emergency be used to provide support for historic rent arrears built up prior to an existing benefit claim for households already in receipt of UC and HB. This is because these arrears are excluded from the criteria for DHPs. However, support with rent arrears is not the primary intent of the fund and should not be the focus of spend.

- Reasonable administrative costs for administering the fund.

Section 3. What will change? What will be different for customers and/or staff?

The North Yorkshire eligibility framework and approach is intended to recognise the current cost of living pressures including inflationary pressures on essential goods and services in particular gas, electricity and other fuel costs over the next 12 months.

Section 4. Involvement and consultation (What involvement and consultation has been done regarding the proposal and what are the results? What consultation will be needed and how will it be done?)

No requirement for formal consultation.

A governance structure has been established to oversee the development and delivery of this phase of HSF. Board membership includes:

Margaret Wallace
Abby Barker
Adele Wilson-Hope
Marcus Lee
Guy Shrimpton
Sarah Foley
Linda Porritt
Helen Knisis
Amber Graver
Hazel Smith

A project team and 4 additional work packages (Communications, Customer Service, Operations - Revenues and Benefits and Technical Product) also support the Board structure. These include officers from locally based, and specialist teams.

Section 5. What impact will this proposal have on council budgets? Will it be cost neutral, have increased cost or reduce costs?

Cost neutral, as all costs covered by HSF allocation. This includes reasonable administrative costs incurred if claimed. Administration activity may include:

- Staff Costs
- Advertising and publicity to raise awareness
- Small IT changes e.g. to facilitate MI production

Section 6. How will this proposal affect people with protected characteristics?	No impact	Make things better	Make things worse	Why will it have this effect? Provide evidence from engagement, consultation and/or service user data or demographic information etc.
Age		✓		The grant determination for the fourth phase of HSF outlines that support for low income families in need, including those with a person of state pension age should be considered. It is intended as part of the programme to directly award support to eligible pensioner households.
Disability	✓			
Sex	✓			
Race	✓			
Gender reassignment	✓			
Sexual orientation	✓			
Religion or belief	✓			
Pregnancy or maternity	✓			
Marriage or civil partnership	✓			

Section 7. How will this proposal affect people who...	No impact	Make things better	Make things worse	Why will it have this effect? Provide evidence from engagement, consultation and/or service user data or demographic information etc.
..live in a rural area?	✓			
...have a low income?		✓		All funds are to be targeted to support households in the most need with energy, food and water bills. It can also be used to support with essential costs related to those items and with wider essential costs.

...are carers (unpaid family or friend)?	✓			
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Section 8. Geographic impact – Please detail where the impact will be (please tick all that apply)	
North Yorkshire wide	✓
Craven district	✓
Hambleton district	✓
Harrogate district	✓
Richmondshire district	✓
Ryedale district	✓
Scarborough district	✓
Selby district	✓
If you have ticked one or more districts, will specific town(s)/village(s) be particularly impacted? If so, please specify below.	
N/A	

Section 9. Will the proposal affect anyone more because of a combination of protected characteristics? (e.g. older women or young gay men) State what you think the effect may be and why, providing evidence from engagement, consultation and/or service user data or demographic information etc.
N/A

Section 10. Next steps to address the anticipated impact. Select one of the following options and explain why this has been chosen. (Remember: we have an anticipatory duty to make reasonable adjustments so that disabled people can access services and work for us)	Tick option chosen
1. No adverse impact - no major change needed to the proposal. There is no potential for discrimination or adverse impact identified.	✓
2. Adverse impact - adjust the proposal - The EIA identifies potential problems or missed opportunities. We will change our proposal to reduce or remove these adverse impacts, or we will achieve our aim in another way which will not make things worse for people.	

3. Adverse impact - continue the proposal - The EIA identifies potential problems or missed opportunities. We cannot change our proposal to reduce or remove these adverse impacts, nor can we achieve our aim in another way which will not make things worse for people. (There must be compelling reasons for continuing with proposals which will have the most adverse impacts. Get advice from Legal Services)	
4. Actual or potential unlawful discrimination - stop and remove the proposal – The EIA identifies actual or potential unlawful discrimination. It must be stopped.	
Explanation of why option has been chosen. (Include any advice given by Legal Services.)	

Section 11. If the proposal is to be implemented how will you find out how it is really affecting people? (How will you monitor and review the changes?)

The DWP provide a monitoring and delivery framework for expenditure. The data will be collected at 4 intervals. The first monitoring return will be submitted in July 2023. Quarterly reviews will enable the Council to determine how many households are applying for the various grants and that the grant is reaching the intended beneficiaries. If there is lower than anticipated take up of the grant further contact will be made with the eligible households to encourage take up.

The final monitoring return is April 2024 which will report on the overall spend profile and track delivery progress in accordance with DWP monitoring requirements.

Section 12. Action plan. List any actions you need to take which have been identified in this EIA, including post implementation review to find out how the outcomes have been achieved in practice and what impacts there have actually been on people with protected characteristics.

Action	Lead	By when	Progress	Monitoring arrangements
DWP MI Return	Margaret Wallace	21 July 2023		
DWP MI Return	Margaret Wallace	20 October 2023		
DWP MI Return	Margaret Wallace	26 January 2024		
DWP MI Return	Margaret Wallace	26 April 2024		

Section 13. Summary Summarise the findings of your EIA, including impacts, recommendation in relation to addressing impacts, including any legal advice, and next steps. This summary should be used as part of the report to the decision maker.

The delivery plan for the distribution of the HSF has been developed and agreed by a range of stakeholders and partners in order to ensure it is fair and equitable and designed to ensure the grant reaches the intended beneficiaries - households on low incomes and in particular those who in receipt of housing benefit who did not receive a cost of living payment.

The distribution will be monitored to ensure it is reaching the intended beneficiaries and actions will be taken at the review point if there is low take up to contact eligible households.

Arrangements will be in place (including through libraries and customer service access points) to ensure households who need additional help to access or utilise vouchers are able to do so.

Section 14. Sign off section

This full EIA was completed by:

Name: Margaret Wallace

Job title: Assistant Director – Customer, Revenues & Benefits

Directorate: Central Services

Signature: Margaret Wallace

Completion date: 16 May 2023

Authorised by relevant Assistant Director (signature): Margaret Wallace

Date: 16 May 2023

Initial Climate Change Impact Assessment

The intention of this document is to help the council to gain an initial understanding of the impact of a project or decision on the environment. This document should be completed in consultation with the supporting guidance. Dependent on this initial assessment you may need to go on to complete a full Climate Change Impact Assessment. The final document will be published as part of the decision-making process.

If you have any additional queries, which are not covered by the guidance please email climatechange@northyorks.gov.uk

Title of proposal	Household Support Fund – Phase 4
Brief description of proposal	To deploy a fourth allocation of Household Support Fund allocation to provide support to households in need who would otherwise struggle to pay essential utility bills, buy food or meet other essential living costs. The £7m allocation is being made available to NYC by DWP to cover the period March 2023 to April 2024. It is proposed that funding will be provided via a household direct award of supermarket vouchers, food banks, energy support, and NYLAF.
Directorate	Central Services
Service area	Customer, Revenues & Benefits
Lead officer	Margaret Wallace
Names and roles of other people involved in carrying out the impact assessment	Adele Wilson-Hope

The chart below contains the main environmental factors to consider in your initial assessment – choose the appropriate option from the drop-down list for each one.

Remember to think about the following;

- Travel
- Construction
- Data storage
- Use of buildings
- Change of land use
- Opportunities for recycling and reuse

Environmental factor to consider	For the council	For the county	Overall
Greenhouse gas emissions	No effect on emissions	No Effect on emissions	No effect on emissions
Waste	No effect on waste	No effect on waste	No effect on waste
Water use	No effect on water usage	No effect on water usage	No effect on water usage
Pollution (air, land, water, noise, light)	No effect on pollution	No effect on pollution	No effect on pollution
Resilience to adverse weather/climate events (flooding, drought etc)	No effect on resilience	No effect on resilience	No effect on resilience
Ecological effects (biodiversity, loss of habitat etc)	No effect on ecology	No effect on ecology	No effect on ecology
Heritage and landscape	No effect on heritage and landscape	No effect on heritage and landscape	No effect on heritage and landscape

If any of these factors are likely to result in a negative or positive environmental impact then a full climate change impact assessment will be required. It is important that we capture information about both positive and negative impacts to aid the council in calculating its carbon footprint and environmental impact.

Decision (Please tick one option)	Full CCIA not relevant or proportionate: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Continue to full CCIA: <input type="checkbox"/>
Reason for decision	Providing support to households in need who would otherwise struggle to pay essential utility bills, buy food or meet other essential living costs will not have a significant environmental impact.	
Signed (Assistant Director or equivalent)	Margaret Wallace	
Date	16 May 2023	