

<b>DECISION TITLE: Household Support Fund Round Five</b>
<b>CABINET MEMBER EXERCISING DELEGATED POWERS: Councillor Mohammed Farooq – Leader of the Council</b>
<b>March 2024</b>
<b>Deadline date:</b> 28 March 2024

Cabinet portfolio holder: Responsible Director:	Cllr John Howard, Corporate Governance and Finance Rob Hill, Service Director Housing and Communities
Is this a Key Decision?	YES If yes has it been included on the Forward Plan: YES Unique Key decision Reference from Forward Plan: KEY/22APRIL24/02/
Is this decision eligible for call-in?	No  With approval from the Monitoring Officer and the Growth, Resources and Communities Scrutiny Committee Chair, the urgency provisions have been evoked to waive the 28-day Forward Plan, 5-day consideration and 3-day call-in periods.
Does this Public report have any annex that contains exempt information?	NO

<b>RECOMMENDATIONS</b>
The Cabinet Member is recommended to:
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Approve the overall approach to the delivery of the Household Support Fund extension.</li> <li>2. Delegate authority to the Executive Director for Place and Economy, in consultation with the Executive Director for Corporate Resources and the Cabinet Member listed above, to finalise the detailed arrangements, including the award of contract(s), for all aspects of the scheme within the guidelines of the scheme and up to the grant determination limit as set out in the Governments Financial Instruction.</li> <li>3. Delegate authority to the Executive Director for Place and Economy, in consultation with the Executive Director for Corporate Resources and the Cabinet Member listed above to approve an extension beyond 30 September 2024 should further Government funds be made available.</li> </ol>

## 1. PURPOSE OF THIS REPORT

- 1.1 This report is for the Leader of the Council to consider exercising delegated authority under paragraph 3.4.3 of Part 3 of the constitution in accordance with the terms of their portfolio at paragraph 3.4.9.

## 2. TIMESCALES

Is this a Major Policy Item/Statutory Plan?	<b>NO</b>	If yes, date for Cabinet meeting	<b>N/A</b>
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- 2.1 Urgent approval is sought for this decision due to the late notification of Government's intention to extend the Household Support Fund. At the time of writing, full details have not been received of the funding or guidance from Government, however during the Spring Budget the Chancellor announced a six-month extension to the fund.
- 2.2 Due to the late announcement, there is insufficient time to undertake standard governance procedures as authority is required to approved expenditure and allow continuity of delivery of services from 1 April 2024.

## 3. BACKGROUND AND KEY ISSUES

- 3.1 In November 2020, the Government announced funding for local authorities to support families and communities through the challenges of Covid-19. Since this time, there has been a succession of further schemes intended to extend support to financially vulnerable households. These have included the Winter Support, and Local Authority Covid-19 Support Grants as well as the Household Support Fund.
- 3.2 The current round of Household Support Fund (HSF) is due to close on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024, however at the Spring Budget, the Chancellor announced a further 6-month extension of the scheme. The council has not yet received details of the funding allocation to the local authority and therefore any approval and subsequent delivery of services outlined in this report is subject to funds being awarded to the council.

The 2023/24 HSF provided support to anyone who met the following criteria:

- Be a resident in Peterborough
- Be in receipt of, or in the process of applying for, any means tested benefit (universal credit / income support / child tax benefits) personal independent payment or disability living allowance.

Or

- Be living in a 'low-income' household – if you are a single person earning less than £25,500 per year or if you are living as a couple and earn a combined income of less than £43,400 (includes those living in houses of multiple occupancy)
- Or experiencing financial hardship (as determined by our staff or trusted partner).

- 3.3 Whilst inflation rates are now falling from their peak, cost of living issues still remain a key problem for many single people and families within Peterborough. The existing HSF has seen significant demand for support from across multiple community hubs and high demand

to access the council's voucher scheme. Between 1 April 2024 and 3 January 2024 (latest data) the scheme has delivered the following:

- **9,624 supermarket vouchers issued, totalling £579,420**
- **9,004 vouchers for food totalling £545,300**
- **620 vouchers for utility costs totalling £34,120**
- **68,155 free school meal holiday vouchers issued totalling £1.78m**

3.4

The council has commissioned over 20 community hubs over the last year to deliver vital support to people within their communities. Hubs have been highly successful in providing safe spaces where people can visit, discuss their issues and receive essential support and advice. It is proposed to extend the funding to community hubs during 2024 to allow them to continue their vital work in meeting the needs of local residents. Subject to funding being confirmed by Government, it is proposed that the following hubs are commissioned to continue delivery. The amount of funding is to be confirmed and approved by the Executive Director of Place and Economy once the allocation from Government has been received by the council as set out in the recommendations above.

<b>Organisation</b>
AGE UK Cambridgeshire and Peterborough
Barnardos
Black History Month Committee Peterborough
Christ the Servant King (CSK) & Chimes Coffee Shop (CiC)
Compas Charity
Dial Peterborough (commonly known as 'Disabilitiy Peterborough')
Faizan E Madina Mosque
Family Action
Family Voice Peterborough
iCare Peterborough
KingsGate Community Church
Light Project Peterborough
Little Miracles
Marys Child
Millfield Community Fridge
Paston Farm Community Foundation

	RCCG DOMINION CHRISTIAN CONNECTIONS
	St John's Church
	St Mark's Community Hub and Safe Space
	Wellspring Community Church
	Westraven Community Café and Garden
	Peterborough Asylum and Refugee Community Association (PARCA)
	Park Road Baptist Church
3.5	CareZone
	African Caribbean Group

### **School Holiday Vouchers**

3.6 It is also proposed to extend the school holiday supermarket voucher scheme for all pupils who are entitled to free school meals. Approximately 13,500 pupils take advantage of this scheme each school holiday helping the most vulnerable families manage their finances. Subject to Government funding, the following support is proposed:

Easter holidays -£30 per pupil  
 May half term - £10 per pupil  
 Summer holidays - £50 per pupil

### **Proposed changes to the Household Support Voucher Scheme**

3.7 The voucher scheme has been administered by Citizens' Advice Peterborough (CAP) on behalf of the council. Whilst the scheme has been highly successful and delivered 9,624 vouchers between 1 April 2024 and 3 January 2024, it has also had significant challenges to overcome. The public demand for vouchers has significantly outstripped the capacity of CAP to deliver and frequently left it unable to promptly deal with enquiries. This has led to public complaints both to the council and CAP when residents are unable to access the support they need.

3.8 In addition, CAP report that its staff and volunteers routinely encounter highly abusive members of the public who attempt to gain additional vouchers or are unhappy when they do not meet the eligibility for the scheme. This has led to reputational damage for the charity and distracted from its core business as an advice agency. For these reasons, CAP has decided to not continue operating the voucher service for any future scheme.

3.9 As the council only received notification of the HSF extension as part of the Spring Budget, and is awaiting confirmation of the funding allocation, it has not been possible to find an

alternative provider that will have the capacity to mobilise and deliver support by April 2024. It is therefore proposed that council officers develop alternative models of support for financially vulnerable households that is in line with Government guidance.

- 3.10 The council recognises that many households may struggle to pay their bills, particularly those on low incomes. Council tax is one of the largest bills that households face and can place additional pressure on stretched household budgets. Officers will explore opportunities for the HSF to be used to support qualifying households with their council tax bills. It is anticipated that support will be offered to households in September 2024.
- 3.11 It is proposed that the council tax support offer, once developed, is delegated for approval to the Executive Director of Place and Economy in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Corporate Governance and Finance and the Executive Director for Corporate Resources.

Details of the future scheme, once approved, will be published on the council's website and communicated to qualifying households, the media, councillors and partner organisations.

#### **4. CORPORATE PRIORITIES**

- 4.1 The recommendation links to the following of the Council's Corporate Priorities:
1. The Economy & Inclusive Growth
  2. Our Places & Communities
  3. Prevention, Independence & Resilience

#### **5. CONSULTATION**

- 5.1 This decision does not require any public consultation in line with grant guidance. However, we have worked with organisations across Peterborough to develop the proposed schemes, including Age UK, Citizens Advice, local food banks, Cross Keys Homes, the local voluntary and community sector forum, the Safer Peterborough Partnership, and Peterborough Council for Voluntary Service.

#### **6. ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES OR IMPACT**

- 6.1 The immediate hardship facing many Peterborough families due to the current cost of living crisis will be alleviated through the provision of food vouchers and support with utility bills and other household support options as well as more direct support through communities for essential supplies.

#### **7. REASON FOR THE RECOMMENDATION**

- 7.1 The extension of the Household Support Fund will allow the council to continue to support the most vulnerable households in our community as they continue to manage the cost of living crisis.

The proposals build upon the existing delivery and outline a model for the council to provide direct targeted support through a council tax support scheme to be introduced later in 2024.

#### **8. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

- 8.1 Option 1 Do not draw down the funding or deliver any of the elements of the scheme. Due to the adverse impact on households who are experiencing financial hardship as well as the preventative effect this funding will have in other areas of our residents' lives such as

impact on children's learning and wellbeing, mental health and wider health issues this option has been discounted.

Option 2 Deliver the full funding through free school meals holiday voucher scheme. Whilst this is feasible, it would benefit a smaller range of households and only a set times of the year. Funding would not be available to support the work of community hubs, many of whom may not be able to continue operating. This option has therefore been discounted.

## **9. IMPLICATIONS**

### **Financial Implications**

- 9.1 The delivery outlined in this proposal is subject to Government confirming the funding allocation which was announced in the Spring Budget.

As set out in the recommendations, the Executive Director of Place and Economy in consultation with the Executive Director of Corporate Resources and the Deputy Leader for Corporate Governance and Finance will approve all details of expenditure under this funding.

### **Legal Implications**

- 9.2 All funding to external organisations will be subject to a grant agreement process and delivery in line with published Government guidance to local authorities.

The school holiday voucher scheme will follow the existing voucher framework procured by the Crown Commercial Service (Framework RM6248 Lot 3).

The framework guidance states that a direct award can be made if:

1. this agreement can meet your product and service needs
2. one supplier meets your needs more than the others and can provide the best value for money
3. you do not need to make any changes to the contract terms and conditions

To place a direct award you will need to:

1. clearly define your needs by developing your specification
2. establish your award criteria using Framework Schedule 7 call off award procedure
3. perform an evaluation of your requirements against supplier price and quality information
4. award your contract by signing Framework Schedule 6 order form template
5. publish your contract on Contracts Finder

In following these guidelines, it is likely that the Council will seek to award a further contract for the delivery of food vouchers to the incumbent supplier on the grounds that a) the service is no cost to the Council and b) that the award to the incumbent will provide continuity of service and ensure that systems are in place to identify those who need this assistance, personal data is protected, efficient and effective delivery of same and if after evaluation of our requirements, the incumbent's price and quality score the highest.

### **Equalities Implications**

- 9.3 No equalities implications have been identified.

**10. DECLARATIONS / CONFLICTS OF INTEREST & DISPENSATIONS GRANTED**

10.1 None

**11. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**

Used to prepare this report, in accordance with the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985) and The Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012.

11.1 None

**12. APPENDICES**

12.1 None