

Record of individual Cabinet member decision

Local Government Act 2000 and the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012

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| Decision made by | Cllr H Pighills |
| Key decision? | No - In accordance with vale of White Horse District Council's Constitution, receipt of a government grant, even one over £75,000, is excluded from the definition of a key decision. |
| Date of decision (same as date form signed) | 4 September 2023 |
| Name and job title of officer requesting the decision | Jayne Bolton Community Wellbeing Manager |
| Officer contact details | Email: jayne.bolton@southandvale.gov.uk |
| Decision | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to utilise £121,338 funding from Oxfordshire County Council for the Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) • to utilise £123,103 Council Tax Support (CTS), to increase the council tax hardship fund for residents for financial year 2023/24 • to utilise £79,815 Household Support Fund 4 (HSF4) funding from Oxfordshire County Council for local welfare allocation • to accept aforementioned funding from Oxfordshire County Council and enter into and to make minor amendments on the corresponding funding agreement (appendix one) • the delegation of authority to the Deputy Chief Executive - Transformation and Operations in consultation with the Head of Finance and s151 officer to approve the associated grants policy and to approve any further associated policies and amendments to them pertaining to the HSF – appendix four. • the delegation of authority to the Head of Finance and s151 officer to approve the associated grants policy and to approve any further associated policies and associated amendments to them pertaining to DHP and CTS – appendix five and six. |
| Reasons for decision | Residents across the district are feeling the impact of significant increases in the cost of living not met by increases in income. Inflation in energy and food costs has had a disproportionate impact on those on the lowest incomes. Despite a range of measures to support households from |

central government, not all needs will be met and many households will be put under severe pressure this winter and throughout the new financial year

Cost of Living Measures

To date, the council offers the following measures to assist with the cost-of-living crisis:

- Removal of the 91.5% working age council tax reduction scheme cap from 2023/24 onwards, benefiting 1,400 low-income households.
- Emergency Support Voucher Provision through the community hub for people at imminent risk of hunger, no heating/lights.
- Funding for food banks and larders across the district through the Food Network Grant Scheme with awards of £2,500 for food network organisations.
- Three rounds of the Household Support Fund, delivered as a voucher scheme in partnership with local advice centres.
- A further £60,000 top up to the Household Support Fund 3 from COMF during 2022/2023, to assist more people who cannot afford basic household essentials and bills.
- Community Connectors advise, signpost and refer residents who are struggling to local charity organisations, food banks and voluntary groups.

Extending the HSF, DHP and CTS schemes will provide further vital financial support through the winter, when fuel costs will be even more expensive, for vulnerable residents.

Household Support Fund

The Household Support Fund (HSF 1) launched on 6 October 2021 to support households struggling to afford food, energy and household essentials. Funds were made available to Oxfordshire County Council as the upper tier local authority who made allocations available to the city and district councils for local welfare arrangements. The acceptance of these funds and the grant policy which governed these local arrangements was agreed by both Councils via an ICMD (ref: 2021 11 03 ICMD HSF VALE FINAL).

The fourth Household Support Fund Extension (HSF4) was announced in February 2023. A further £842 million has been made available for Local Authorities in England to support those most in need due to the significant rises in living costs.

As with the previous three rounds of HSF, Oxfordshire County Council receive the Household Support Fund with the expectation that they will make funding available to lower tier

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| | <p>authorities as appropriate for the circumstances of the area.</p> <p>For HSF4 the allocation of funding made available to the council from Oxfordshire County Council for welfare distribution will be £79,815.</p> <p>Discretionary Housing Payment and Council Tax Support</p> <p>On 20 September 2022, Oxfordshire County Council passed a range of measures aiming to assist residents through the cost-of-living crisis. One of these measures is ‘matched funding’ for the city and district councils to set up Council Tax Hardship Funds.</p> <p>Vale of White Horse District Council utilised ‘matched funding’ during the 2022/23 financial year (January 2023) to increase provision of the Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) and Council Tax Support (CTS) schemes.</p> <p>Capacity to manage the DHP and CTS schemes will be made within the current Revenues and Benefits Client team and each case will be individually vetted and considered on its own merits to avoid any potential for fraud or misuse of the limited funds available.</p> <p>The allocation of spend is to be agreed at district level but is both consistent with the guidance and in line with approaches taken by other councils.</p> |
| <p>Alternative options rejected</p> | <p>To not accept the HSF allocation or utilise funding from Oxfordshire County Council for the DHP and CTS schemes, and not make payments available to individuals.</p> <p>There is a risk that vulnerable households will experience higher levels of deprivation during the cost-of-living crisis, and as the country recovers from the impact of the pandemic.</p> <p>Additionally, there is a reputational risk in not doing this and not using the councils’ position to support vulnerable households.</p> |
| <p>Climate and ecological implications</p> | <p>None</p> |
| <p>Legal implications</p> | <p>The funding agreement will be entered into with Oxfordshire County Council (appendix one). The draft funding agreement has been drawn up by the county council covering the onward distribution of the grant monies and reporting requirements for each strand of funding.</p> |

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| | <p>The funds should only be used towards the projects as defined in the agreement as Household Support Fund, Discretionary Housing Payment and Council Tax Support unless a different purpose is first approved and authorised by Oxfordshire County Council.</p> <p>No grant will be paid unless and until Oxfordshire County Council is satisfied that such payment will be used for proper expenditure in the delivery of the Project.</p> <p>The Grant period is defined as the period for which the Grant is awarded and ending 31 March 2024.</p> <p>The funds must be spent during the grant period and any unspent funds must be returned to OCC.</p> <p>Due to the urgency with which the fund needs to be open, officers request that HSF4 can open ahead of the final funding agreement. The funds are claimed in arrears as per previous agreements and the two public sector bodies have worked on this basis for the previous agreements. The funding agreement will need to be completed before being able to claim the funds and whilst this is in train the fund is at risk. However, given that the funding agreement is substantively the same as all previous household support funds, the risk in proceeding ahead of the agreement is deemed to be minimal.</p> |
| <p>Financial implications</p> | <p>Household Support Fund 4 welfare allocation- £79,815</p> <p>There are no financial implications to the council except for staff resource from the Community hub team who will oversee the distribution of support vouchers and manage relationships with referring agencies. Staff costs will be covered by the existing funding arrangements for the community hub.</p> <p>Payment of the grant from DWP to Oxfordshire County Council £79,815 will be paid in instalments, in arrears, following receipt of management information, as set out in the COL Schedules for Districts (appendix two).</p> <p>Payment will only be made for confirmed expenditure. Paragraph 65 of Household Support Fund Guidance (appendix three) confirms the dates payment will be made to Oxfordshire County Council.</p> <p>The County Council will transfer funds following submission of district management information listed in Clause 3 of the agreement (appendix one).</p> <p>Spend will be closely monitored to ensure that the total</p> |

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| | <p>number of voucher awards are only allocated up to the value of the fund. No third-party organisations will be responsible for spending the funds.</p> <p>Discretionary Housing Payment and Council Tax Support</p> <p>There are no financial implications as County Council are funding both the Discretionary Housing Payment and Council Tax Support funding provided by DWP to city and district councils.</p> <p>£121,338 funding for the Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) £123,103 funding for Council Tax Support (CTS)</p> | | | |
| Other implications | None | | | |
| Background papers considered | <p>Appendix one – Oxfordshire County Council Funding agreement (currently draft)</p> <p>Appendix two – Cost of Living Schedules for Districts</p> <p>Appendix three – Household Support Fund Guidance</p> <p>Appendix four – Household Support Fund Policy 2022 (to be updated)</p> <p>Appendix five – Discretionary Housing Payment Policy</p> <p>Appendix six – Council Tax Support Policy</p> | | | |
| Declarations/conflict of interest? Declaration of other councillor/officer consulted by the Cabinet member? | N/a | | | |
| List consultees | | Name | Outcome | Date |
| | Legal | Vera Dilyanova | The agreement seems to be in a standard form and there does not seem to be anything specifically unacceptable. | 16/08/23 |
| | Procurement | n/a | | |
| | Information Governance | n/a | | |
| | Policy and Programmes | n/a | | |
| | Community Wellbeing | n/a | | |
| | Senior Management Team (deputy chief executive) | Adrianna Partridge | Happy to Support | 23/08/2023 |
| | Senior Management Team | n/a | Approved | 23/08/2023 |
| | Finance | Richard Spraggett | Comments received and ICMD updated | 15/08/23 |

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| | | | accordingly | |
| Confidential decision? If so, under which exempt category? | No | | | |
| Call-in waived by Scrutiny Committee chairman? | No | | | |
| Has this been discussed by Cabinet members? | Yes | | | |
| Cabinet portfolio holder's signature To confirm the decision as set out in this notice. | Cllr Helen Pighills Date: 04/09/2023 | | | |

ONCE SIGNED, THIS FORM MUST BE HANDED TO DEMOCRATIC SERVICES IMMEDIATELY.

| For Democratic Services office use only | | |
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| Form received | Date: 5 September 2023 | Time: 8.55am |
| Date published to all councillors | Date: 5 September 2023 | |
| Call-in deadline | Date: N/A | Time: |

Guidance notes

1. This form must be completed by the lead officer who becomes the contact officer. The lead officer is responsible for ensuring that the necessary internal consultees have signed it off, including the chief executive. The lead officer must then seek the Cabinet portfolio holder's agreement and signature.
2. Once satisfied with the decision, the Cabinet portfolio holder must hand-sign and date the form and return it to the lead officer who should send it to Democratic Services immediately to allow the call-in period to commence.
Tel. 01235 422520 or extension 2520.
Email: democratic.services@southandvale.gov.uk
3. Democratic Services will then publish the decision to the website (unless it is confidential) and send it to all councillors to commence the call-in period (five clear working days) if it is a 'key' decision (see the definition of a 'key' decision below). A key decision cannot be implemented until the call-in period expires. The call-in procedure can be found in the council's constitution, part 4, under the Scrutiny Committee procedure rules.
4. Before implementing a key decision, the lead officer is responsible for checking with Democratic Services that the decision has not been called in.
5. If a key decision has been called in, Democratic Services will notify the lead officer and decision-maker. This call-in puts the decision on hold.
6. Democratic Services will liaise with the Scrutiny Committee chairman over the date of the call-in debate. The Cabinet portfolio holder will be requested to attend the Scrutiny Committee meeting to answer the committee's questions.
7. The Scrutiny Committee may:
 - refer the decision back to the Cabinet portfolio holder for reconsideration or
 - refer the matter to Council with an alternative set of proposals (where the final decision rests with full Council) or
 - accept the Cabinet portfolio holder's decision, in which case it can be implemented immediately.

Key decisions: assessing whether a decision should be classified as 'key'

The South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils' Constitutions now have the same definition of a key decision:

A key decision is a decision of the Cabinet, an individual Cabinet member, or an officer acting under delegated powers, which is likely:

- (a) to incur expenditure, make savings or to receive income of more than £75,000;**

- (b) to award a revenue or capital grant of over £25,000; or**
- (c) to agree an action that, in the view of the chief executive or relevant head of service, would be significant in terms of its effects on communities living or working in an area comprising more than one ward in the area of the council.**

Key decisions are subject to the scrutiny call-in procedure; non-key decisions are not and can be implemented immediately.

In assessing whether a decision should be classified as 'key', you should consider:

- (a) Will the expenditure, savings or income total more than £75,000 across all financial years?
- (b) Will the grant award to one person or organisation be more than £25,000 across all financial years?
- (c) Does the decision impact on more than one district council ward? And if so, is the impact significant? If residents or property affected by the decision is in one ward but is close to the border of an adjacent ward, it may have a significant impact on that second ward, e.g. through additional traffic, noise, light pollution, odour. Examples of significant impacts on two or more wards are:
 - Decisions to spend Didcot Garden Town funds (significant impact on more than one ward)
 - Changes to the household waste collection policy (affects all households in the district)
 - Reviewing a housing strategy (could have a significant impact on residents in many wards)
 - Adopting a supplementary planning document for a redevelopment site (could significantly affect more than one ward) or a new design guide (affects all wards)
 - Decisions to build new or improve existing leisure facilities (used by residents of more than one ward)

The overriding principle is that before 'key' decisions are made, they must be published in the Cabinet Work Programme for 28 calendar days. Classifying a decision as non-key when it should be a key decision could expose the decision to challenge and delay its implementation.