

Subject:	Local Authority Emergency Assistance Grant for Food and Essential Supplies		
Date of Meeting:	9 September 2020		
Report of:	Acting Chief Finance Officer		
Contact Officer:	Name:	Graham Bourne	Tel: 01273 291800
	Email:	Graham.bourne@brighton-hove.gov.uk	
Ward(s) affected:	All		

FOR GENERAL RELEASE

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND POLICY CONTEXT

- 1.1 On 11 June 2020 the government announced £63m in new funding for local authorities to assist those struggling to afford food and other essentials. The Department for Environment Food & Rural Affairs (DEFRA) allocated £0.321m to Brighton and Hove on 10 July and the Council accepted the offer.
- 1.2 This report contains the proposals for the use of this grant in Brighton & Hove

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 2.1 That the Policy & Resources (Recovery) Sub-Committee agrees the proposal for the distribution of the Local Authority Emergency Assistance grant funding as shown at paragraph 3.4 of this report.

3. CONTEXT/ BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 3.1 DEFRA has issued guidance outlining the conditions of the award and the purpose for which it is intended to be used (Appendix 1). The key components of these conditions were that the grant:
- Is used for future spend from July 2020;
 - Should mostly be awarded within 12 weeks;
 - Is predominantly for food and essentials and to a degree advice and support for longer term solutions;
 - Should have a minimal spend on local authority administration;
 - Should build on existing schemes to deliver outcomes where the need is greatest.
- 3.2 The proposal below is in keeping with DEFRA's guidance and builds on the structures and partnerships that have successfully developed as the city's initial response to demand during the period April to July 2020.
- 3.3 While the fund will be effectively distributed in the required 12 week timescale, the intention is to create financial resilience in preparation for a potentially difficult

winter ahead when it is anticipated that demand for support will be higher than it is now. Therefore, the proposed allocation is based on projections to 31 March 2021.

3.4 The proposed allocation of the grant funding is as follows:

1	Ageing Well provision for shopping related tasks and support to maximise independence/regain confidence	£0.045m
2	Food partnership Continuous support September 2020 to March 2021, for foodbanks and to keep open the food hubs in the areas of the greatest need and awarding fairness across the city.	£0.094m
3	Local Discretionary Social fund 3 step support extended food voucher support while households engage with advice and support services	£0.080m
4	Schools meals team food vouchers for households that become newly eligible for Free School Meal vouchers, with no access to the Summer vouchers	£0.004m
5	Childrens Services Assist with essential items such as nappies, formula, clothes and pregnancy kits	£0.010m
6	BMECP continue existing foodbank/service catering for the diverse dietary needs of their clients	£0.010m
7	City Mission and Hove Salvation Army additional recognition for central foodbanks with high demand for those in supported accommodation and emergency placements	£0.006m
8	Local Discretionary Social Fund Winter Emergency remainder of fund to help with food and essentials for those in emergency need	£0.071m
	TOTAL	£0.320m

Appendix 2 explains the detail behind these proposals in more detail.

3.5 The table below indicates how the proposed DEFRA grant allocation would support the existing inter-related work to provide a holistic service. The design follows tried and tested pathways and ensures that citizens making contact should be swiftly directed to the appropriate support provider. Beyond the services listed in the table, the Community Hub has established liaison and referral routes to existing council and voluntary sector services for anything that falls outside the regular types of query.

Food and essential item emergency provision	Food Partnership	DEFRA funding
Food stock for foodbanks	Food Partnership	DEFRA funding
Nappies/toiletries stock for foodbanks	Food partnership	DEFRA funding
Food club/pantries	Food partnership	DEFRA funding

Fareshare fees for all of above	Food Partnership	DEFRA funding
Delivery of essentials	Food Partnership	DEFRA funding
Ongoing support for long term solutions - food and essentials(all ages)	Ageing well	DEFRA funding
Befriending / shopping service	Ageing Well	DEFRA funding
Triage – non emergency food, essentials & support	Ageing well	DEFRA funding
Triage – emergency food, essential & support	Community Hub	Existing revenue budget until 310321
Emergency food vouchers, household items	LDSF	Existing service
Conditional support pathway to independent budgeting for food 3x3. (3 week full support, 3 weeks additional support if advisory support has been engaged, further 3 weeks if support/ welfare officer requests to embed solution.)	LDSF	DEFRA funding
Exceptional food case fund – for families who have missed qualifying criteria but need support e.g. UC claims not processed in time to be eligible.	School Meals Team	DEFRA funding
Discretionary support fund , nappies/ toiletries/ maternity/pregnancy	Children’s Services	DEFRA funding
Winter funded – allocation to emerging pressure points	LDSF	DEFRA funding – requires Section 151 approval to allocate

Strategic aims

- 3.6 Prior to COVID-19, requests for food were largely directed to the Local Discretionary Social Fund (LDSF). One of the main roles of this team is to assist in a disaster or emergency with food and essential items. However, the team also looks at a person’s broader situation and helps with income maximisation, referrals for budgeting and money advice, and linking up to help resolve broader housing issues.
- 3.7 In response to COVID 19 this changed, and the food requirements of the City were managed by the Community Hub due to the volume of people presenting with needs. Due to the speed of the emergency food response no formal scrutiny of the household/person’s financial position was put in place. Many of these households were referred on to foodbanks and these households’ underlying issues need to be reviewed and addressed.
- 3.8 It is now recognised that many foodbanks are finding it hard to move people on from their support into a more sustainable situation. The proposed model will begin to address the ‘move on’ and sustainability issue. It should be established

why help for food is needed; in order to do this, we would need to know a household's financial situation and then be able to offer a variety of solutions, such as budgeting, benefits, debt management, healthy eating/cooking within means.

Background information

- 3.9 Many of the people who require help with food are in Council Housing, Temporary Accommodation and Emergency Placements.
- 3.10 Universal Credit and the Local Housing Allowance have both increased since the start of COVID-19, yet we know households are still struggling to purchase basic items. The reasons for this vary, but might include ongoing DWP deductions in respect of advance payments and other debt, so we need to identify what the main issues are in each case.
- 3.11 Debt overall is a growing issue that prevents households from being able to budget adequately for basics.
- 3.12 Children's Services saw an increase in requests for help with food and essential items. 99 families were unknown to the service prior to COVID-19. Queens Park and East Brighton wards had the most families receiving food support. Moulsecoomb and Turner areas have the highest number who access the Children's Centre services.
- 3.13 The Local Discretionary Social Fund saw a big increase in applications in April and the first part of May 2020. 63% of the application were for food and utilities. The Wards that saw the most applications were East Brighton, Queens Park, St Peters & North Laines, Regency and Moulsecoombe & Bevendean. Most of the applications were from single and single parent households. 34% are Council Housing Tenants and 14% Housing Association tenants compared to 19% from the private sector.

Adapting the Community Hub in light of demand and the DEFRA grant

- 3.14 The council formed the Community Hub as the conduit for food and support contact during the lockdown period. Information from the Community Hub to the end of the June 2020 shows the following requests for help (although there are some caveats with the data):
- Medical Collection 15.56% (316)
 - Mental Health Support 17.43% (354)
 - Requires Physical Support 12% (250)
 - Self-isolating 74% (1503)
 - Require Food 82.77% (1681)
 - Requires Money Financial Support 19.84% (403)
 - Needing financial assistance 13.24% (269)
 - Does not have money to buy own food 61.21% (1029) (contradicting the low percentage saying they need financial assistance)
- 3.15 The level and nature of demand has now changed and as part of the incorporation of the DEFRA grant, the Hub will be realigned to support the

response in the second half of this year. A reduced function will move to the Revenues & Benefits service where it can sit alongside the Welfare Support function, which includes Local Discretionary Social Fund and Welfare Rights and is the focal point for building the response capacity for the expected increase in demand for support relating to debt.

- 3.16 This is an additional function and there is currently no proposal to extend funding of this service, nor, because of the conditions set by DEFRA, can it be funded from the DEFRA grant. However, Revenues & Benefits has been providing officers to the community hub from the outset and will continue to allocate resources to provide the required model of service to 31 March 2021. If the hub needs to be scaled up in the interim, for example due to a localised outbreak and lockdown, additional resource may be required from other services. In either case, the overall provision beyond 31 March 2021 would need a corporate reassessment of funding/savings targets.

Monitoring

- 3.17 Partner organisations will be required to maintain basic data for monitoring purposes and the Revenues and Benefits service will undertake monthly reviews, in conjunction with the Food cell, to ensure that the funding is being spent appropriately.

4. ANALYSIS & CONSIDERATION OF ANY ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 4.1 The DEFRA grant has enabled the council to commit to a broad range of ideas, some at relatively low cost, so it has not been necessary to consider alternative options. However, projecting forward, there is an element of uncertainty about how COVID-19 demands will change. Officers will monitor how this develops, in conjunction with the grant recipients.
- 4.2 If there is a new and unforeseen need around food and essential supplies and officers will redirect funds from the remainder LDSF allocation, or from other funding streams if it appears likely that those streams are due to underspend their allocation, or are no longer fulfilling the aims of the grant allocation.

5. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & CONSULTATION

- 5.1 There is no legal requirement to consult on the proposals outlined in this report, and due to the DEFRA requirement of allocating the fund within 12 weeks, a public consultation is not practicable in the available timescale.
- 5.2 Officers have however consulted the following organisations, services and teams regarding how to allocate the fund:

Brighton & Hove Food Partnership
Brighton & Hove Children's Service
Brighton & Hove School Meals Team
Community Hub
The Black & Minority Ethnic Community Centre
Voice in Exile
Ageing Well

6. CONCLUSION

- 6.1 The broad funding plan for deployment of the DEFRA grant means that diverse communities in the city can continue to be supported with emergency food and other needs, whilst also enabling and route through to more sustainable options for each household.

7. FINANCIAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

Financial Implications:

- 7.1 The council has accepted the Local Authority Emergency Assistance Grant for Food and Essential Supplies offer of £0.321m. The grant conditions state the grant must be spent in 2020/21 with the expectation the funding to be used within 12 weeks of receipt of the funds. The grant was received on 31st July 2020 and therefore the aim is to use the funding by 23rd October 2020.
- 7.2 The purpose of the grant funding is intended to help local authorities to continue to support those struggling to afford food and other essentials over the coming months due to COVID-19. The recommendations within this report are in line with this purpose.
- 7.3 The Community Hub was created by redirecting existing resources and any additional expense is reflected in the normal Targeted Budget Management (TBM) financial reporting.
- 7.4 In March 2020 the government allocated to the council a £2.330m Hardship fund, which primarily was targeted at providing a £150 reduction to the residual council tax bill for working age Council Tax Reduction Scheme claimants which was estimated at £1.940m. Policy & Resources Urgency Sub Committee on 31st March 2020 approved that the estimated balance of £0.390m be earmarked to enhance existing discretionary and local welfare funds

Finance Officer Consulted: James Hengeveld

Date: 14/08/20

Legal Implications:

- 7.5 There are no legal implications arising directly from this report.

Lawyer Consulted:

Alice Rowland

Date: 17/8/20

Equalities Implications:

- 7.6 An EIA has been prepared for the DEFRA grant allocation (Appendix 3). The funding recommendations have been developed with consideration of how best to support groups and individuals with protected characteristics, for example giving emphasis to the BMECP, and including an element around childcare essentials, alongside maintaining our core activities designed to support vulnerable people and older people. Part of the EIA acknowledges that there will be continued monitoring of how those with protected characteristics are

impacted. There is also a draft Equalities Impact Assessment being prepared by the COVID-19 Recovery Response Food Cell in relation to the overall food strategy, and officers will continue to monitor equalities impacts against both EIA's, linking also to the Vulnerable People cell and the Welfare Support and Financial Assistance cell.

Sustainability Implications:

- 7.7 There are no direct sustainability implications.

Brexit Implications:

- 7.8 There are no direct Brexit implications. However, the support provided by the grant will cross over the transition period and so may contribute to the convergence of risk around a resurgence of COVID-19, winter flu, severe weather and Brexit.

Public Health Implications:

- 7.9 It is anticipated that some of the measures made possible by the DEFRA grant will contribute to improved public health. For example, the plans include trying to move people on from dependency on food support, which will improve their physical, mental and financial health.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

Appendices:

1. DEFRA grant letter
2. The proposals explained
3. EIA

