



# NOTICE OF MEETING

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## **CABINET MEMBER FOR COMMUNITIES AND CENTRAL SERVICES**

**TUESDAY, 22 FEBRUARY 2022 AT 2.00 PM**

## **VIRTUAL REMOTE MEETING**

Telephone enquiries to James Harris - Senior Local Democracy Officer 02392 606065  
Email: James.Harris@portsmouthcc.gov.uk

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### **Membership**

Councillor Chris Attwell (Cabinet Member)

### **Group Spokespersons**

Councillor George Fielding  
Councillor Lee Mason

Councillor Jeanette Smith

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(NB This agenda should be retained for future reference with the minutes of this meeting).

Please note that the agenda, minutes and non-exempt reports are available to view online on the Portsmouth City Council website: [www.portsmouth.gov.uk](http://www.portsmouth.gov.uk)

## **A G E N D A**

- 1 Apologies for Absence**
- 2 Declarations of Interest**
- 3 How the Council is using the Household Support Fund to assist residents in financial hardship (Pages 3 - 10)**

The purpose of this report is to outline the assistance being provided to residents of Portsmouth in financial hardship, making use of the Household Support Fund made available by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP).

**This is an information report for noting only.**

**4 Staff Wellbeing Survey (Pages 11 - 14)**

The purpose of this report is to present the findings of the recent Staff Wellbeing Survey.

**This is an information report for noting only.**

<p>This meeting is webcast (videoed), viewable via the Council's livestream account at <a href="https://livestream.com/accounts/14063785">https://livestream.com/accounts/14063785</a></p>
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# Agenda Item 3



## THIS ITEM IS FOR INFORMATION ONLY

(Please note that "Information Only" reports do not require Integrated Impact Assessments, Legal or Finance Comments as no decision is being taken)

<b>Title of meeting:</b>	Cabinet Member for Communities and Central Services
<b>Subject:</b>	How the council is using the Household Support Fund to assist residents in financial hardship
<b>Date of meeting:</b>	Tuesday 22 February 2022
<b>Report by:</b>	James Hill - Director for Housing, Neighbourhood and Building Services
<b>Author:</b>	Mark Sage - Tackling Poverty Coordinator
<b>Wards affected:</b>	All

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**1. Requested by** Councillor Chris Attwell, Cabinet Member for Communities and Central Services

### **2. Purpose**

2.1 To outline the assistance being provided to residents of Portsmouth in financial hardship, making use of the Household Support Fund made available by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP).

### **3. Information Requested**

#### **3.1 Background**

3.1.1 On 6 October 2021, the Department for Work and Pensions announced a new £500m Household Support Fund (HSF) for County Councils and Unitary Authorities in England, to support those most in need this winter due to financial hardship.

3.1.2 On 5 November, DWP published the final guidance for local authorities<sup>1</sup> outlining how the funds could be used.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/household-support-fund-guidance-for-local-councils/household-support-fund-final-guidance-for-county-councils-and-unitary-authorities-in-england>

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- 3.1.3 Portsmouth City Council (PCC) can receive up to £1,888,214.70 to support households in the most need with food, energy and water bills, by paying for those items or 'wider essential costs'.
- 3.1.4 In exceptional circumstances of genuine emergency, rent and service charge costs can be included, if no other form of assistance is available to cover the cost.
- 3.1.5 The provision of money advice and assistance with household mortgage costs are specifically excluded from this scheme.
- 3.1.6 HSF is similar to previous grants issued to local authorities; Covid Winter Grant Scheme (CWGS) (December 2020 - March 2021, then extended to April 2021) and Covid Local Support Grant (CLSG) (April - June 2021, then extended to September 2021). In July 2021, local authorities were notified that there would be no further CLSG funding after September 2021.
- 3.1.7 PCC made use of the full allocation of funding available under CWGS and CLSG.
- 3.1.8 While previous grants focussed on the impact of Covid on families, with a requirement that at least 80% of grants must go to families with dependent children, HSF was launched following the reduction in Universal Credit (UC) entitlements of £20 per week, which took effect from October 2021. At least 50% of HSF grants must go to families with dependent children, so up to 50% can go to other types of household.
- 3.1.9 The reduction in UC affected around 17,000 households in Portsmouth, a loss of income of around £1.47m per month.
- 3.1.10 This loss was partly mitigated for some households on UC by the reduction in the taper rate (the amount of UC deducted for every £1 earned), with all households on UC earning more than £1,316 seeing their UC increase by at least £20 per week from December 2021. However, there was no increase for any out of work households.
- 3.1.11 Other grant funding is also being used to support people in financial hardship currently:
  - 3.1.11.1 An additional allocation of Homelessness Prevention Grant (HPG) is being used to help people in the private rented sector with rent arrears due to the impact of the pandemic.



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3.1.11.2 In partnership with this, the Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) team are working to identify people who would be eligible for either DHP or HPG to cover unmet housing costs and prevent homelessness.

3.1.11.3 £50,000 Practical Support Fund is being used to assist people in financial hardship who need to self-isolate due to Covid.

### **3.2 Priorities for support**

- 3.2.1 The provision has been designed to cover a wide range of needs, and can be accessed in a number of ways.
- 3.2.2 Due to the short timescale for which the grant will be available, it was not possible to implement a single scheme that could receive applications, make an assessment of need, and make decisions on providing financial support.
- 3.2.3 Working in partnership with other agencies in the city, and providing support in a range of ways, has enabled us to build on the relationships that already exist between local agencies and people in Portsmouth facing financial hardship, minimising the necessary administration costs to maximise the funding available to support residents.
- 3.2.4 Communications have focussed on a consistent message around income maximisation and access to specialist money and debt advice via council-funded services at Advice Portsmouth and the Area Housing Offices, and also via Citizens Advice Portsmouth.
- 3.2.5 HSF has enabled the council to continue providing support to families of children eligible for free school meals during the school holidays, when loss of income and additional costs place an extra burden on lower income households. The scheme to provide supermarket vouchers is delivered in partnership with schools, and has also been used to promote the council's holiday activities and food programme, HAF Fun Pompey.
- 3.2.6 The council's partnership with HIVE has enabled the delivery of a discretionary grant scheme, providing vouchers for food, furniture and other household essentials, and items of white goods. Grants are awarded based on referrals from a wide range of council teams and voluntary sector partner agencies.
- 3.2.7 Switched On Portsmouth provides a wide range of support to help people save energy and save money, working with The Environment Centre, a charity based on Southampton. In addition to advice and referrals for home improvements, The Environment Centre are delivering a voucher scheme for anyone struggling

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with the cost of their energy, providing meter top-up vouchers for pre-payment customers, and supermarket vouchers for those who pay for their energy monthly or quarterly. This offers immediate relief to top up the meter or pay a bill, alongside advice and support that can reduce household energy costs longer term.

3.2.8 The council works closely with foodbanks, community meals and pantries, which have played a vital role throughout the pandemic in supporting residents facing income or cost shocks. Funding has enabled these services to purchase additional food and other essentials to enable them to meet the current high levels of need.

3.2.9 HSF has been used to purchase additional items for the HIVE's School Uniform Sharestore, to ensure a full range of items to meet the needs of parents accessing the service.

3.2.10 The council's Play and Youth sites are located in areas with higher levels of deprivation and have used HSF funding to purchase food and other items for children accessing these services.

3.2.11 Some lower income families with a young person attending college require support from the council for their transport to college. Following the reduction in UC entitlements, a number of these families were having difficulty meeting their contribution to transport costs, potentially putting the young person's participation in education at risk. HSF was provided to these families to meet the transport costs contribution for the Spring term.

### **3.3 Impact of providing support**

3.3.1 The table in Appendix 1 outlines the support provided up to the end of January, and the anticipated spend to the end of the scheme.

3.3.2 The discretionary grant scheme and energy voucher scheme both opened at the end of November and in the first month of operation received 616 referrals for support from agencies working with people in financial hardship in Portsmouth.

3.3.3 This highlights the high level of need in the city, and the number of agencies seeking additional help to meet their service users' needs.

3.3.4 218 households received a discretionary grant, with a total value of £77,650 of vouchers for food and other essentials, and £43,228 of white goods being provided. This included 53 cookers, 47 fridges or fridge freezers, and 36

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washing machines. All of these items will have a significant impact on the health and wellbeing of the households who were unable to afford these essential items. 129 of these households included dependent children, and 32 reported that a member of the household had a serious physical or mental health condition or disability.

- 3.3.5 398 households received a voucher to help with the cost of their energy, at a time when many were facing higher energy bills due to the rise in the energy price cap in October, and the onset of colder weather.

3.4 Additional provision from February

- 3.4.1 Additional provision is being added to the existing schemes outlined above, to meet further needs and ensure the best use of the available funds.
- 3.4.2 The additional provision includes; free half term holiday activities for children eligible for free school meals, a scheme to provide carpets or other suitable flooring for vulnerable residents who cannot afford this, financial support for council tenants struggling with the cost of their heating charges, an exceptional hardship fund for Council Tax customers who are unable to afford their payments and where all other forms of support have been exhausted, a scheme to pay Debt Relief Order or Bankruptcy registration fees where this cost is the only barrier blocking someone from achieving the right debt solution, funding for additional communication to inform residents where they can access free and independent money advice and how this could help.

3.5 Support for people in financial hardship from April 2022

- 3.5.1 To date, the DWP has made no announcement of any funding for local authorities to support residents in financial hardship after April 2022.
- 3.5.2 If no further funding is provided, the council will continue to work with partners to meet the needs of residents, through the provision of practical assistance and money advice.
- 3.5.3 Information on advice and assistance available to residents will continue to be published on the council's website at [portsmouth.gov.uk/money](https://portsmouth.gov.uk/money).

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Signed by James Hill - Director of Housing, Neighbourhood and Building Services

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**Appendices:**

Appendix 1 - Household Support Fund expenditure plan 1 February 2022

**Background list of documents: Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972**

The following documents disclose facts or matters, which have been relied upon to a material extent by the author in preparing this report:

<b>Title of document</b>	<b>Location</b>
Household Support Fund: final guidance for County Councils and Unitary Authorities in England	<a href="https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/105444/Household-Support-Fund-final-guidance-for-County-Councils-and-Unitary-Authorities-in-England.pdf">Household Support Fund: final guidance for County Councils and Unitary Authorities in England - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)</a>



Appendix 1 - Household Support Fund expenditure plan 1 February 2022

<b>Scheme</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Spend to 31/01/22</b>	<b>Estimated cost total</b>
School holiday vouchers for early years, schools and colleges	£15 per week for each eligible child for Oct half term, Christmas, Feb half term, Easter	£443,095	£886,000
Discretionary grants scheme	Referral scheme, fulfilment provided by HIVE	£197,000	£507,000
Energy voucher scheme	Referral scheme, fulfilment provided by The Environment Centre	£50,000	£125,000
Grants for foodbanks and community meals	Funding to support increased demand for food aid	£20,500	£35,000
Funding for items for distribution by larders		£1,000	£1,000
School uniform		£2,000	£2,000
Food and other essentials for families in need	Provided by PCC's Play and Youth services	£1,200	£5,000
Transport costs for young people from low income families in post-16 education	To cover the parental contribution to transport costs, for 29 young people with additional needs who meet exceptional criteria for help with transport costs		£4,785
Holiday Activities and Food	February half term funded places with HAF partner providers		£17,000
Carpets and flooring scheme	For people in need identified by Children's Social Care, Early Help and Prevention or Housing Office teams		£25,000
LAH heating charge support			£15,000
Council Tax exceptional hardship fund	For customers in financial hardship where all other forms of financial support have been exhausted		£25,000
Insolvency fees grant scheme	For people requiring a Debt Relief Order or Bankruptcy but unable to afford the fee		£3,000
Additional voucher or payment scheme for low income households			£160,630
Money advice communications			£1,800
Administration costs			£75,000

<b>Total</b>		<b>£723,995</b>	<b>£1,888,215</b>
Admin costs as % of total grant			4.1%

# Agenda Item 4



## **THIS ITEM IS FOR INFORMATION ONLY**

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<b>Title of meeting:</b>	Communities & Central Services Portfolio Meeting
<b>Subject:</b>	Staff Wellbeing Survey
<b>Date of meeting:</b>	22 February 2022
<b>Report by:</b>	Director of Corporate Services
<b>Wards affected:</b>	N/A

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### **1. Purpose**

The purpose of this report is to present the findings of the recent Staff Wellbeing Survey.

Throughout the pandemic the council has undertaken staff surveys to engage with staff to support their health and wellbeing. The purpose of engaging with staff in this way is to comply with the council's duty of care as employer, and importantly, to maintain a healthy workforce able to continue to deliver services to residents and those most vulnerable in Portsmouth communities (noting that over just over 50% of the workforce are also Portsmouth residents).

### **2. Background**

All staff were invited to take part in a short wellbeing survey between 9 and 26 November 2021. This follows a similar survey that was conducted in February 2021.

Issues covered in the survey included working arrangements, how satisfied with work and how supported staff feel, and access to wellbeing support and advice. Staff were also asked about the ways they receive information currently, and how they would like to do so in future to help us develop our internal communications to better meet the needs of staff, and to make use of developing technology.

All staff had the opportunity to complete the survey, and paper copies were available for those without access to email. In total, 1630 staff (42%) took part and the sample is broadly representative of the total staff population. Results from the survey in February 2021 also allow us to compare how staff are feeling at the end of 2021, compared with the beginning of the year.

### **3. Summary analysis**

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The survey shows that most staff who responded remain overall satisfied with their work, feel supported by the council, know where to access wellbeing support and advice and don't feel internal communications needs to improve.

Staff however are feeling slightly less satisfied with their work and supported by the council when compared with the survey response from February 2021. Whilst this is perhaps not surprising given the significant challenges presented by the ongoing pandemic to the work and home life of staff and reflects national wellbeing indicators, it is important we use the findings to inform our work both at a directorate and corporate level to support staff as best we can.

### **4. Key findings**

- Some 41% of respondents are currently working from home and at a workplace, 29% only at home, and 25% only at a workplace. There is a significant 26 percentage point decrease of staff working solely from home compared with the February 2021 survey.
- Just under two-thirds of staff are satisfied with their work, this is a three-percentage point decrease since February 2021. Staff working exclusively at home are most satisfied (72%) whilst those working exclusively at work are least (22% are dissatisfied).
- Having a high workload was the most common reason for staff being dissatisfied, negatively impacting their work (44%). Struggling to work from home or in the office also featured as a common reason for staff feeling dissatisfied with their work (30%). Some staff feel that they are not getting enough support from their team or manager (23%).
- Whilst most staff feel supported by the council (62%) this has reduced since February (-six percentage points). Staff working exclusively at work feel least supported.
- The vast majority of staff know where to access wellbeing support (78%); although this has reduced since February by seven percentage points.
- Most staff (59%) are able to strike the right balance between work and personal time; however, a fifth still do not feel they are able to achieve this.

### **General comments**

Staff were asked to comment if there is anything more they feel the council could do to support them now. Many respondents would like better support for their wellbeing in their work environment, both working from home and in the office (16%). Reducing expectations on workloads and working hours would also help staff feel more supported. This includes emphasis on only working contracted hours (12%). Many staff would also like to continue or enable greater flexibility of ways of working (11%). More contact and support from management would also better support some respondents (10%). Some staff would like the council to show a better appreciation and recognition of staff, as well as some clarity about future ways of working (9% each).

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### **5. Conclusions**

It will be important for the council to continue to monitor and address staff wellbeing and attendance levels among the workforce as a key enabler of business continuity. Workforce wellbeing is a key driver of staff productivity and engagement enabling delivery of the council's plan for recovery and renewal.

### **6. Actions and Next Steps**

Directors are working with senior managers on the directorate specific analysis to review the feedback from their areas, understand the issues and develop action plans that address the specific issues in their teams.

We will develop and improve our communications with managers, picking up on the outcomes from this survey, reflecting the role of managers in leading change and managing wellbeing.

We will review access to wellbeing support and refresh the communications to staff around this. Staff who are working solely in the workplace are least likely to know where wellbeing support is available and feel least supported, and we will work with managers of these staff to target communications.

Visible commitment from the senior leadership team affects the culture and can ensure health, safety and wellbeing is further embedded across the council. It can also encourage people to have the courage to discuss any health concerns in the knowledge that they will be listened to and receive support. We will develop the visibility of the support for this by senior managers.

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Signed by Natasha Edmunds, Director of Corporate Services

### **Appendices:**

#### **Background list of documents: Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972**

The following documents disclose facts or matters, which have been relied upon to a material extent by the author in preparing this report:

<b>Title of document</b>	<b>Location</b>

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