

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL – RECORD OF OFFICER DECISION

DECISION TAKEN BY:

Zena Cooke – Corporate Director Finance

DECISION NO:

OD/22/0003

For Internal Records, Publication Not Required

Subject matter:

Household Support Grant allocation to Water Companies

Cabinet Member decision to which this action relates:

Decision Number 21/00107

[Decision - 21/00107 - Household Support Grant \(kent.gov.uk\)](#)

Decision:

To award a total of £540,000 of the Household Support Fund to water companies in order to support vulnerable Kent households with their water bills.

To be allocated as follows:

- South East Water - £250,000
- Affinity Water - £202,500
- Southern Water - £47,500
- Thames Water - £40,000

Reason(s) for decision:

As set out in the [Decision Report](#), £4.065m of the Household Support Fund is allocated for households who need support with food, energy and water, and essentials linked to food, energy and water. All water companies are required to have a hardship fund and the Household Support Grant will be used to support customers that fit the Household Support Fund's eligibility criteria. The amount awarded to water companies in Kent and the criteria is decided in discussion with the water companies, reflecting the geographical size of their customer base. This criteria is outlined in more detail below. All water companies agreed to take a similar 'back on track' approach, targeting funding to those customers in debt, that are actively engaged in the repayment process but whose financial situations mean that they are struggling to repay their arrears.

South East Water has its own ongoing 'Helping Hands Scheme' which awards funding to customers that are not in a position to clear the arrears on their account due to limited income, despite their efforts. South East Water's scheme has had an increased level of applications and this funding will provide them an opportunity to support new applications and revisit previous unsuccessful applications in order to make payments to those in need. The grant will be used to clear their arrears or a proportion of their arrears, with a £250 payment. South East Water will require £4,000 towards admin costs to ensure the payments are made quickly to their customers. A total of 984 Kent households will be supported with a total grant of £250,000.

Affinity Water has identified 810 households with arrears that will take more than 6 months to clear based on current payments. The £202,500 Household Support Fund grant will be used to clear their arrears or a proportion of their arrears, with each household identified receiving a £250 payment,

thereby giving the customers a fresh start and an opportunity to manage their ongoing water bills.

Southern Water has identified 190 households to whom it supplies freshwater services, with a significant debt balance that demonstrates significant financial difficulties. The £47,500 Household Support Fund grant will be used to clear their arrears or a proportion of their arrears, with a payment of £250 per household.

Thames Water has identified 160 households whose known circumstances would result in customers not being able to clear arrears in a reasonable amount of time due to limited income. A grant of £40,000 from the Household Support Fund would allow these households to receive a payment to clear their arrears or a proportion of their arrears with a payment of £250 per household.

In total, the £540,000 funding will support 2,144 Kent households.

Financial Implications:

£540,000.00 allocation of Household Support Fund.

There are no direct financial implications on the Council's revenue budget as the allocation is grant funding received from the government to support the Council's response to the Covid-19 pandemic. The activities and projects funded by the Household Support Fund are time limited and will not be a recurring cost to the Council. Any additional staff resourcing required as a result of activities and projects funded by the grant are eligible to be charged to the grant.

Legal implications:

A grant agreement setting out the conditions of the grant for each water company will be signed and sealed before any grant monies are awarded.

All funding awarded must be in line with the stipulations in the Decision Report.

Equality Implications:

This decision comes under the equality implications as set out in the Report for decision 21/00107. Efforts have been made to ensure that eligibility criteria are clearly defined and non-discriminatory.

Comments received from any Members or Officers consulted:

This decision relates to Decision 21/00107.

Roger Gough:

I support this project and look forward to receiving information on the outcomes and the future metrics.

Any alternatives considered and rejected:

Two alternate funding proposals were discussed with the water companies and rejected:

1. Expanding Social Tariff – widening eligibility for customers to access the Social Tariff scheme that the water companies already have in place. This was rejected due to high level of funding required and the need for data sharing agreements to be created, which would not be possible prior to the grant deadline.
2. A KSAS referral process wherein KSAS identify customers that are struggling with their water

bills and who would benefit from grant funded support. A process could be set up for KSAS to securely advise water companies of these customers, with a route for instructing a payment from the fund to be applied. This was rejected on the basis that fewer customers would be identified and supported in comparison to the chosen scheme and, as there are no suitable referral mechanisms and data sharing agreements in place, arranging the appropriate referral process would not be possible against the deadline of the grant.

The Council could have chosen not to allocate grants from the Household Support Fund to a range of water companies, instead working with just one provider but this was rejected on the basis that it would limit the number of households across Kent that would receive support based on their geographical location.

The Council could have chosen not to allocate grant funding to water companies but this was rejected on the basis that water is not a discretionary utility and therefore all residents are required to pay for their water provision; the Key Decision committed to using the Household Support Fund to support vulnerable households with their water bills.

Any conflict of interest declared by any executive member consulted by the decision maker and any dispensation granted by the Proper Officer:

No conflicts declared.



Signed: Zena Cooke

Date: 22 March 2022