

## **SLOUGH BOROUGH COUNCIL**

<b>REPORT TO:</b>	Cabinet
<b>DATE:</b>	27 February 2023
<b>SUBJECT:</b>	Procure a provider of e-vouchers for Housing Support Fund awards
<b>CHIEF OFFICER:</b>	Steven Mair – Executive Director – Finance and Commercial (S151)
<b>CONTACT OFFICER:</b>	Andy Jeffs – Interim Head of Transactions – Revenues, Benefits and Charges
<b>WARD(S):</b>	All
<b>PORTFOLIO:</b>	Cabinet Member for Customer Services, Procurement and Performance – Councillor Ajaib
<b>KEY DECISION:</b>	Yes
<b>EXEMPT:</b>	No
<b>DECISION SUBJECT TO CALL IN:</b>	Yes
<b>APPENDICES:</b>	None

### **1 Summary and Recommendation**

- 1.1 To seek authority from Cabinet for commencement to procure a 5-year (1yr+1yr+1yr+1yr+1yr) contract to provide e-vouchers. Having this contract in place will provide an additional facility to support vulnerable residents who apply for help through the Housing Support Fund. The total potential cost of the contract is £1m, but that is dependent of the funding being made available by central government. The Household Support Fund has been extended by 12-months to 31 March 2024 so, the minimum contract spend will be £0.2m.

#### **Recommendations**

Cabinet is recommended to:

- (a) authorise commencement of procurement for the provision of an e-voucher provider
- (b) delegate authority to the Executive Director for Finance and Commercial following consultation with the Cabinet Member for Customer Services, Procurement & Performance to award a contract.

## **Reason**

- 1.2 To ensure that Cabinet has proper oversight of planned procurement activity and delegated authority is allowed where timescales are insufficient and to increase the methods of support available to the Council to help vulnerable residents through the Housing Support Fund.

## **Commissioner Review**

- 1.3 The Commissioners are content with this report.

## **2 Report**

### **Introduction**

- 2.1 On 30 September 2021, the government announced that vulnerable households across the country would be able to access a new £500 million support fund to help them with essentials over the winter. This funding covered the period 6 October 2021 to 31 March 2022.
- 2.2 The Household Support Fund was distributed by councils in England to directly help those who needed it most. The grant was distributed through small payments to support vulnerable households meet daily needs such as food, clothing, and utilities.
- 2.3 The Household Support fund has been extended twice since the initial tranche of funding covering the periods April 2022 to September 2022, and October 2022 to March 2023. Slough's current allocation covering the period to March 2023 is £1.177m.
- 2.4 The government announced in the Autumn Statement that the Household Support Fund would be extended for a further year, to the end of March 2024.

### **Background**

- 2.5 The Household Support Fund requires the Council to support vulnerable residents in need of cost-of-living assistance. Support through the fund is currently given in the form of vouchers to support those children receiving free school meals during the school holidays. This provides additional support to care leavers and other vulnerable families known to relevant Council teams, and to individuals and families through a discretionary application process.
- 2.6 The Council currently provides support to vulnerable residents via Paypoint and through vouchers to purchase food through the Sainsburys gifting platform, with white goods supplied through Argos. The Debt and Welfare service also works closely with the Slough Foodbank.
- 2.7 By contracting with a new provider to implement an e-voucher scheme that has wider access to other supermarket outlets around the borough it would offer residents a choice to shop closer to where they live or to shop around to allow the vouchers to stretch further.

### **Framework**

2.8 The key objectives a new provider would need to satisfy are:

- The offer a choice of multiple supermarket outlets.
- Vouchers are issued digitally via email without any need to print so we know the person allocated the voucher uses it.
- Option for officers to edit and reissue vouchers.
- Able to add a message to recipient when a voucher is issued.
- Reporting on spend, redemptions and expired vouchers.
- Set-up is free of charge.
- The only cost is the face value of vouchers.
- Offers discounts/savings.
- It operates a float system so people just pay for what is used.
- The return of Housing Support Fund float at the end of the scheme.
- Closed loop grocery merchant.
- Have experience of working with local authorities.
- The recipient of an e-voucher can choose and select more than one outlet.
- Option for redemption can be click and collect, spend on-line or in store.

2.9 Officers have identified that The Crown Commercial Framework RM6255 as one that satisfies the required objectives and would be the best way to decide whether we need to look at a mini competition or a direct award.

2.10 The contract duration will be for five-years (1yr+1yr+1yr+1yr+1yr) however, the actual duration would depend on the period of funding available. Although the service could be considered to be used to make other discretionary awards.

2.11 The minimum contract spend would be £0.2m, the value of the fund in 2023/24 that has been confirmed by government.

### **3 Implications of the Recommendations**

#### **3.1 Financial implications**

3.1.1 There are no direct financial costs to the Council as these are all funded through the Household Support Fund, including the administrative cost of the scheme.

#### **3.2 Legal implications**

3.2.1 This contract will be procured in line with the Council's Contract Procedure Rules.

#### **3.3 Risk management implications**

3.3.1 There are no specific issues arising directly from this report.

#### **3.4 Environmental implications**

3.4.1 There are no specific environmental implications arising directly from this report.

#### **3.5 Equality implications**

3.5.1 There are no equality implications arising directly from this report.

### 3.6 Procurement implications

3.6.1 Procurement have reviewed the business case and confirmed that the Council will seek to obtain value for money by sourcing this procurement via the CCS framework No. RM6255 which offers e-vouchers via 10 appointed suppliers. This framework offers implementation and management of retail voucher schemes with multiple merchants, including a platform to provide and distribute those vouchers to end recipients. A detailed analysis of what is offered by each of the 10 qualified suppliers has been conducted. It is permissible to direct award via this framework provided a detailed analysis is conducted to evidence value for money and justification of direct award.

### 3.7 Workforce implications

3.7.1 There are no workforce implications arising directly from this report.

### 3.8 Property implications

3.8.1 There are no property implications arising directly from this report.

## **4 Background Papers**

None