

URGENT DECISIONS

Wednesday, 17th November, 2021, 10.30 am

Members: Councillor Peray Ahmet

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

To receive any apologies for absence.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

A member with a disclosable pecuniary interest or a prejudicial interest in a matter who attends a meeting of the authority at which the matter is considered:

- (i) must disclose the interest at the start of the meeting or when the interest becomes apparent, and
- (ii) may not participate in any discussion or vote on the matter and must withdraw from the meeting room.

A member who discloses at a meeting a disclosable pecuniary interest which is not registered in the Register of Members' Interests or the subject of a pending notification must notify the Monitoring Officer of the interest within 28 days of the disclosure.

Disclosable pecuniary interests, personal interests and prejudicial interests are defined at Paragraphs 5-7 and Appendix A of the Members' Code of Conduct

3. HOUSEHOLD SUPPORT FUND IN HARINGEY (PAGES 1 - 12)

Please be advised that the Chair of Overview and Scrutiny has agreed that the call-in procedure shall not apply to this urgent decision. This is because the decision is urgent and any delay in implementation caused by the call-in procedure would seriously prejudice the Council's or the public's interests due to the fact that any delay in decision making will impact on the ability to utilise available funding to support families with children, other vulnerable households and individuals in Haringey. The Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee has agreed that the decision is both reasonable in all circumstances, and that it should be treated as a matter of urgency. This is in accordance with Part 4, Section H, and Paragraph 18 (a) and (b) of the Council Constitution.

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Tuesday, 16 November 2021

Report for: Urgent Decision – Cabinet Member Signing (Leader)

Title: Household Support Fund in Haringey

Report

Authorised by: Thomas Skeen, Assistant Director for Finance

Lead Officer: Edward Ashcroft, Policy & Equalities Officer

Ward(s) affected: All

Report for Key/

Non Key Decision: Key

1. Describe the issue under consideration

- 1.1 The government announced £500 million of new grant funding in October 2021 through the 'Household Support Fund' to help vulnerable people to access essentials over the winter as the recovery from the pandemic continues and the cost of living increases. The funding will enable the Council to provide support to families with children and other vulnerable residents from 6 October 2021 until 31 March 2022. Haringey's allocation of this fund is £2,406,671.72.
- 1.2 Cabinet has already approved – by Urgent Decision – the allocation of up to £1 million for the continued provision of food support for families with children eligible for Free School Meals during school holidays. This report now seeks a further decision to allocate the remaining funds, in line with the grant conditions, and as set out in the policy document at Appendix 1 of the report.

2. Recommendations

The Leader is asked:

- 2.1. To approve the additional funding allocation from the Government in the sum of around £1.4 million to support low-income families and residents most in need and in financial hardship and to be delivered through the Council and partners.
- 2.2. To approve the updated Household Support Fund Scheme Policy [November 2021] at Appendix 1 of the report, which sets out the Council's allocations and arrangement for administering the funding provided by the government.
- 2.3. To delegate authority to the Assistant Director for Finance, in consultation with the Leader of the Council, to amend this policy to give effect to changes in legislation, statutory or non-statutory guidance, or directives or instructions of a similar character issued by the government.
- 2.4. To agree that this policy is subject to the availability of government funding and will terminate on 31 March 2022 unless terminated earlier or extended beyond this date by Cabinet or Cabinet Member decision.

3. Reasons for decision

- 3.1. The Government, through the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP), has provided funding to local authorities to provide and administer the Household Support Fund. The objective of the Fund is to provide support to households who would otherwise struggle to buy food or pay essential bills or meet other essential living costs or housing costs (in exceptional cases of genuine emergency) this winter as the economy recovers from Covid-19. It is acknowledged that local authorities have the local ties and knowledge and are best placed to allocate funding according to local need.
- 3.2. The scheme provides for local authorities to determine eligibility in their area and target support to those most in need within the scope of conditions set by DWP. This report and the policy at Appendix 1 explains how the Council will do this.
- 3.3. The Household Support Fund payments are expected to support households over the grant period and for funding to be spent between 6 October 2021 and 31 March 2022. There is a need for an urgent decision to be taken on the recommendation in order to ensure that payments are made to support vulnerable people within the allotted time.

4. Alternative options considered

- 4.1. The alternative option considered was not to develop a Haringey Support Fund Policy. This was discounted as it would not have made use of potential support to Haringey residents and would have necessitated a return of the funds to central government.

5. Background

- 5.1. The objective of the Household Support Fund is to provide support to vulnerable households, including families with children, over the winter as the recovery from the pandemic continues and the cost-of-living increases. This is the latest in a series of grants since the onset of the pandemic in March 2020 which have provided temporary funding for local government to support residents with urgent financial needs.
- 5.2. When administering the scheme, Local Authorities are encouraged to apply the following principles:
 - Use discretion on how to identify and support those in need
 - Use the funding from 6 October 2021 up to 31 March 2022 to meet essential needs and help those who are struggling to afford food and utility bills.
- 5.3. At least 50% of the total funding is ring-fenced to support families with children, with up to 50% of the total funding to other types of households, including individuals.
- 5.4. Authorities have the flexibility within the Household Support Fund to identify which vulnerable households are in most need of support and to apply their own discretion when identifying eligible households. Authorities can request applications for support or can proactively identify households who may benefit – or can take a mixture of the two approaches. There is no requirement for Authorities to undertake a means test.
- 5.5. Residents in Haringey have faced a series of financial challenges over the past 18 months, including increased levels of unemployment, furlough, and cost of living pressures associated with lockdown, which are likely to have increased inequality in the borough. There are now a range of new financial pressures, driven by an increase

in the cost of living (including significant increases to energy prices) at the same time as some benefits and employment support has come to an end.

5.6. In this context, the objectives of this policy are:

- To support households in Haringey by ensuring they can access essentials such as food, fuel and water - without needing to accumulate debt
- To help residents to access all the financial support to which they are entitled - so that they can find sustainable routes out of challenging household financial circumstances as far as possible
- To support households with dignity and without stigma - enabling residents to be as independent as possible

5.7. The policy focuses on four areas:

- Provision of Free School Meal vouchers for school-aged children during holidays
- Direct cash payments of £150 targeted to those identified through our data as in financial need
- Support (cash or in kind) from council services or partners working with vulnerable or harder to reach residents
- Additional money for the Haringey Support Fund through which residents can apply for support with essentials and white goods/furniture

5.8. Further details on the allocation and approach are set out in the policy document at Appendix 1.

5.9. During Covid-19, the council has received a range of temporary support funding. We will take learnings from the distribution of these funds, and ensure that our support is aligned with our distribution of other similar pots, including (for example) the additional money Haringey has been allocated to support private renters.

6. Contribution to strategic outcomes

6.1. This Household Support Fund Policy helps to meet the priorities and outcomes of Haringey's Borough Plan 2019-2023. It also supports the council's strategic efforts to mitigate the impact of Covid-19 in the local community.

7. Statutory Officer Comments

7.1 Finance

7.1.1 Finance comments are contained throughout this report: the Council is proposing to put in place measures to spend funds obtained from the Household Support Fund Grant in line with the grant conditions.

7.1.2 The increase in income and expenditure budgets will be addressed in the cabinet quarterly budget monitoring reports.

7.2 Legal

7.2.1 The grant funding to local authorities for the Household Support Fund scheme is made pursuant to Section 31 of the Local Government Act 2003 which permits the Government to pay grant to local authorities towards expenditure incurred or to be

incurred by it. The grant may be paid on such conditions as the Government may determine. The DWP letters to local authorities Chief Executives dated 6th October 2021, the draft Household Support Fund Grant Determination 2021 No 31/[] and Household Support Fund: – Guidance for County Councils and Unitary Authorities in England sets out the conditions for the grant funding. While the Council can determine the arrangement for administering the Scheme (including identifying those most in need and eligible for support), it must ensure that the funding conditions are met.

7.3 Procurement

7.3.1 Strategic Procurement notes the contents of this report. Where any third party spend, is required on goods or services; these must be via a compliant procurement process in line with the Council's Contract Standing Orders.

7.4 Equalities

7.4.1 The Council has a Public Sector Equality Duty under the Equality Act (2010) to have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation and any other conduct prohibited under the Act
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share those protected characteristics and people who do not
- Foster good relations between people who share those characteristics and people who do not.

7.4.2 The three parts of the duty applies to the following protected characteristics: age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy/maternity, race, religion/faith, sex and sexual orientation. Marriage and civil partnership status applies to the first part of the duty.

7.4.3 The proposed decision is to approve the Household Support Fund Scheme Policy (attached at Appendix 1) which sets out the Council's arrangement for administering new funding provided by the government.

7.4.4 The objective of this decision is to support residents who are facing increased costs this winter due to pressures on household finances, including due to inflation, rising energy prices, and changes to Universal Credit. This will impact low-income residents across the borough, amongst whom there are a disproportionate number with protected characteristics.

7.4.5 It is noted that support will be targeted to residents known to the council and partners as in need, and that a variety of delivery mechanisms (proactive payments, support through council services and partners, and an application-based system) will be used. This approach will help to ensure that as many residents can receive support as possible, including those who may be harder to reach or face challenges in accessing the support available to them.

7.4.6 Due to the design of the different aspects of the policy, the fund is expected to specifically benefit: children and young people (who will be supported through Free School Meal provision, targeted support to households eligible for Healthy Start Vouchers and vulnerable families and children); residents who are socioeconomically

disadvantaged (identified using benefits data and through application to the Haringey Support Fund); women, who are predominantly the victims of domestic abuse, BAME people who are overrepresented in the NRPF cohort, vulnerable adults, such as older people and those with disabilities and long-term health conditions (who will be proactively targeted for support through the Council and its partners).

7.4.7 It is also noted that the support is subject to the availability of government funding and criteria. There are no expected negative equalities consequences arising from this decision.

8. Use of appendices

Appendix 1: Haringey Household Support Fund Policy [November 2021]

9. Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985

Not Applicable

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Haringey Council

Household Support Fund Scheme Policy

November 2021

1. Introduction

- 1.1. This document sets out Haringey Council's ('the Council's') approach to supporting people through the additional funding from the Department for Work and Pension's 'Household Support Fund'.
- 1.2. This fund runs from 6 October 2021 until 31 March 2022 and is designed to support those on low incomes with access to essentials such as food and fuel as the economy recovers from the pandemic and the cost-of-living increases.
- 1.3. When administering the scheme, Local Authorities are encouraged to apply the following principles:
 - Use discretion on how to identify and support those in need
 - Use the funding from 6 October 2021 up to 31 March 2022 to meet essential needs and help those who are struggling to afford food and utility bills.
- 1.4. At least 50% of the total funding is ring-fenced to support families with children.
- 1.5. Authorities have the flexibility within the Household Support Fund to identify which vulnerable households are in most need of support and to apply their own discretion when identifying eligible households. Authorities can request applications for support or can proactively identify households who may benefit – or can take a mixture of the two approaches. There is no requirement for Authorities to undertake a means test.

2. Objectives of the policy

- 2.1. The objectives of this policy in Haringey are:
 - To support households by ensuring they can access essentials such as food, fuel, and water - without needing to accumulate debt
 - To help residents to access all the financial support to which they are entitled - so that they can find sustainable routes out of challenging household financial circumstances as far as possible
 - To support households with dignity and without stigma - enabling residents to be as independent as possible

3. Delivery

- 3.1. The council will take a combination of delivery approaches – reaching out to residents identified through our data or by our services and partners, whilst also ensuring that residents can also apply to the council for support. This mix of approaches will aim to reach as many residents as possible whilst limiting the burden of application on residents.
- 3.2. Where possible and appropriate, the council will take a cash-based approach to provide residents with dignity and choice. This will also ensure residents can respond to a range of cost-of-living pressures this winter.
- 3.3. Proactively providing support to residents will be a central part of our delivery. By drawing on our data and the knowledge of our service areas and partners, the council will reach out to residents and offer them direct support. Critically, this will mean that residents do not need to apply – reducing the burden of application and ensuring that support reaches those who need it quickly and efficiently.
- 3.4. In addition, we will ensure that there are routes for residents to come to us and ask for help. By bolstering our local welfare assistance scheme, the Haringey Support Fund, we will ensure that we can pick up support not captured elsewhere. This recognises that through our data and networks we will not be able to reach everyone who needs our help. This will also ensure that those who face unexpected challenges can still get the help they need.
- 3.5. In recognition of the notable pressures on energy prices, our standard payment will be £150. This is the upper end of the average price increase per year following the 12% increase in the Ofgem price cap in October 2021.
- 3.6. However, where support is delivered through our services or partners, there will be room for discretion to allow frontline professionals to use their judgment to provide residents with appropriate support.
- 3.7. Support will be available to households with No Recourse To Public Funds in line with relevant guidance.

4. Allocations

- 4.1. The maximum additional spend from the Household Support Fund is £2,406,671.72.
- 4.2. The table below sets out the proposed allocations. This includes an upper limit, which will allow officers a small amount of discretion, in consultation with the Leader and Lead Members, to move funding between different projects. This is designed to ensure the council can remain agile and respond to emerging needs as this fund is delivered over the next 5 months.

Project	Description	Proposed allocation (limit)
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Holiday free school meal vouchers	Free School Meal vouchers for school-aged children during holidays	£1m (up to £1m)
Direct cash payments to those in financial hardship	Direct cash payments of £150 targeted to those identified through our data as in financial need, including a specific payment for families with pre-school children	£0.8m (up to £1.1m)
Discretionary cash or in-kind support through council services and partners	Support (cash or in kind) from council services or partners working with vulnerable or harder to reach residents, including £100k to support food banks	£0.4m (up to £0.5m)
Application-based cash and in-kind support through the Haringey Support Fund	Additional money for the Haringey Support Fund through which residents can apply for support with essentials and white goods/furniture	£0.1m (up to £0.25m)
Administration	5% costs	£0.12m

5. Free School Meals (FSM) Holiday Provision

- 5.1. Provision of food support for households eligible for Free School Meals up to a maximum spend of £1,000,000.
- 5.2. This will include vouchers of £15 per week during the school holidays for those eligible for Free School Meals. This will reach over 9,000 residents.
- 5.3. The council will provide comparable targeted support to families with pre-school children through a range of other initiatives set out below.

6. Direct cash payments to those in financial need

- 6.1. Direct cash payments of £150 for those identified as in financial need through council databases up to a maximum spend of £1,100,000 (current proposed spend £800,000).
- 6.2. Most of this spend will support residents identified through benefits data held by the council. In particular, through our 'Low Income Family Tracker' (LIFT), we can identify groups of residents who are struggling financially. Where a resident has been identified as in need, we will proactively send them a £150

redeemable cash voucher. By proactively reaching out to residents, this will reduce the burden of application and ensure that residents can get the support they need quickly and efficiently. We will also use this opportunity wherever possible to help residents access other supports or benefits which they might be eligible for, including other benefits (such as a Warm Homes Discount) or support services. This will help to deliver our objective of helping residents to access wider support through which they can find sustainable solutions to ongoing challenges.

- 6.3. Our payments will target those identified through our LIFT database as being in 'cash shortfall' – which means they have a take-home-income that is less than their expected expenditure, and do not have enough savings to meet 3 months' worth of outgoings. Using these indicators will help us to target our support to those who are most in need this winter.
- 6.4. An additional payment will also be made to those on this database who are eligible for Healthy Start Vouchers. This payment will mirror the provision for free school meals vouchers during school holidays (i.e. a total of £90 per child) and ensure that those with pre-school children also receive the support that they need.
- 6.5. Where possible as the programme progresses, we will also identify additional residents in need through our databases to support residents who are in the most need.
- 6.6. Where residents are not supported directly through this project, they will still be able to apply for support through the Haringey Support Fund (see paragraph 8) or may be supported through the other interventions explained in this policy document.

7. Proactive cash and in-kind support through council services and partners

- 7.1. Proactive support (cash or in kind) support made through council services or partners working with vulnerable residents up to a maximum spend of £500,000 (current proposed spend £400,000).
- 7.2. Alongside our data-targeted support, we will also use our networks – within council services and through our partners – to reach a wide range of residents who may be harder to reach or have particular circumstances which make them vulnerable to the increase in cost of living, such as health conditions.
- 7.3. Supporting residents in this way will ensure that we get the money to those that need it, and that it is accompanied by a wider set of support to help them build pathways towards sustainable solutions.

7.4. This support will include £100k to support food banks, and £300k allocated to partners and council services to support residents who may not receive help through other areas of this policy. This will include funding for council services and partners to directly help the following residents who have been identified as in particular need:

- Those at risk of homelessness
- Those with NRPF
- Those at risk of domestic violence
- Vulnerable adults (such as those who are elderly or who have health conditions)
- Vulnerable families and children
- Families with children of pre-school age

8. Application-based cash and in-kind support through the Haringey Support Fund

8.1. Additional funding for the Haringey Support Fund up to a maximum spend of £250,000 (current proposed spend £100,000).

8.2. The council will not be able to reach every resident in need through the other areas set out in this policy. There will always be circumstances which cannot easily be accounted for (such as a broken boiler) and our data and knowledge may not capture every resident who requires support. Therefore, we will top up the 'Haringey Support Fund' through which residents can apply to us, and which will act as a way to provide additional emergency support to residents.

8.3. Eligibility is set out on the council website.

9. Policy implementation and review

9.1. In applying the Policy, the Council will have regard to relevant implementation guidance as issued.

9.2. We will review our spend against our objectives at regular periods throughout the fund, to ensure that we remain flexible and can respond to emerging challenges as they develop.

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