

MINUTES OF MEETING Cabinet Member Signing HELD ON Tuesday, 3rd May, 2022, 11.00am

PRESENT:

Councillors: Peray Ahmet - Leader of the Council

ALSO ATTENDING: Thomas Skeen, Charlotte Pomery and Ayshe Simsek

4. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence.

5. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interests put forward.

6. HOUSEHOLD SUPPORT FUND IN HARINGEY

The Government, through the Department of Works and Pensions (DWP) launched the Household Support Fund in October 2021 for the period October 2021 – March 2022. The Government had further announced that the Household Support Fund would be extended for the period 1st April – 30th September 2022. The objective of the Scheme was to provide support to vulnerable households and families with children struggling with the significant rise in living costs with an emphasis on supporting households with energy, food and water bills. Local authorities were responsible for administering the Scheme and funding had been allocated to each authority. Haringey Council had been allocated £2,406,671.72 for the six month period April – September 2022.

The funding would enable the Council to provide support to families with children, other vulnerable households and individuals. The Household Support Fund will allow the Council to extend and expand its support to households in food or fuel poverty.

This report was seeking Leader approval for the proposed arrangement for the initial spend of funding as set out in the policy document (attached) to the report, which was within the conditions stipulated by DWP. This decision would be followed by a second decision to allocate the remaining funding available.

This decision was agreed as urgent by the Chair of Overview and Scrutiny as there was a need for schools to put in place the mechanisms to enable payments to be made to support families with children, in line with the draft guidance, and to continue to access Free School Meals vouchers during the May half term school holiday.

RESOLVED

1. To approve the additional Housing Support Fund allocation from the Government of £2,406,671.72 for the period April – September 2022.
2. To approve the Household Support Fund Scheme Policy: April 2022 which sets out the Council's arrangement for administering part of the additional funding and is attached at Appendix 1.
3. To delegate authority to the Assistant Director Commissioning, 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 Government.
4. To agree that this policy is subject to the availability of government funding and will terminate on 30th September 2022 unless terminated earlier
5. To note that a further set of recommendations for spend of the existing funding will come forward in due course and within the requirements of guidance.

Reasons for decision

The Government through the Department of Works and Pensions (DWP) has provided funding to local authorities to administer the Household Support Fund. It is acknowledged that local authorities have the local ties and knowledge and are best placed to allocate funding according to local need.

The Guidance for the Scheme, which remains draft at this stage, provides for local authorities to determine eligibility in their area and target support to those most in need but within the scope of conditions set by DWP. The proposed decision on the Household Support Fund sets out how the Council will target and deliver support to residents. This spend is targeted to those that are most in need and is in accordance with the Scheme.

The Household Support Fund payments are expected to support households over the grant period and for all funding to be spent between 1st April 2022 and 30th September 2022. The Council has identified that the cohort of families with children who have low household income and are eligible to receive free school meals vouchers, are both particularly impacted by the current economic environment and meet the criteria set out in the draft guidance and therefore will be supported under the continued Household Support Fund. Without additional funding, there is a potential gap during holiday periods in support for families with children who access free school meals in term time, as directly provided free school meals are not available at this time. There is a need, therefore, for an urgent decision to be taken on the recommendation in order to ensure that payments are made to support families with children, in line with the draft guidance, to continue to access Free School Meals vouchers during the May half term school holiday.

Alternative options considered

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.

A further option was to bring forward plans to allocate the total amount of funding at this stage, but as the guidance remains draft and more work needs to be carried out in order to ensure that the Fund is spent with maximum beneficial impact for local residents, this option was discounted.

Please be advised that the Chair of Overview and Scrutiny has further 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 households 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.

CHAIR:

Signed by Chair

Date