

NOTICE OF MEETING

URGENT DECISIONS

Wednesday, 3rd March, 2021, 2.00 pm -

Members: Councillor Joseph Ejiofor

Quorum: 1

1. 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. HARSHIP FUND ALLOCATION (PAGES 1 - 10)

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 timely support needed for families with children, other vulnerable households and individuals. Accordingly, 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 of the Council Constitution.

Felicity Foley
Committees Manager
Tel – 020 8489 2919
Fax – 020 8881 5218
Email – felicity.foley@haringey.gov.uk

John Jones
Monitoring Officer (Interim)
River Park House, 225 High Road, Wood Green, N22 8HQ

Tuesday, 02 March 2021

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

Title: Hardship Fund allocation

Report

authorised by : Richard Grice, Director of Customers, Transformation and Resources

Lead Officer: Jean Taylor, Head of Strategy and Policy

Ward(s) affected: All

Report for Key/

Non Key Decision: Key

1. Describe the issue under consideration

- 1.1 The Government announced in the Budget on 11 March 2020 that it would provide local authorities in England with £500m of new grant funding to support economically vulnerable people and households in their local area. Haringey's allocation of this Hardship Fund was £3,663,000.
- 1.2 In line with government guidance, the Council used this fund to implement a reduction of £150 on the annual tax bill to all who were at the time within Haringey's Council Tax Reduction Scheme (CTRS). Where a taxpayer's liability for 2020-21, following the application of council tax support, was less than £150 then their liability was reduced to nil. The same reductions have been applied to anyone moving into the CTRS during 2020/21. Any subsequent changes to a taxpayer's individual circumstances, which means they no longer qualify for the CTRS, have had this additional reduction adjusted pro-rata to the number of days they were eligible for CTRS.
- 1.3 Government guidance is that, having allocated grant to reduce the council tax bill of working age CTRS recipients by £150, councils should establish their own local approach to using any remaining grant to assist those in need. This paper and the appended report set out the allocation of that remaining grant.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 It is recommended that the Leader:
 - i. Approves the funding allocation as set out in paragraph 5.4 and Appendix 1;
 - ii. Delegates authority to the Director for Customers, Transformation and Resources, in consultation with the Leader of the Council to re-distribute funding between the headings set out in appendix 1 and the schedule in Appendix 2 according to emerging need; and
 - iii. Agrees that this policy is subject to the availability of government funding and will terminate on 31st March 2021 unless terminated earlier or extended beyond this date by Cabinet / Cabinet Member decision.

3. Reasons for decision

- 3.1 The Government has provided a Hardship Fund to local authorities and produced guidance that enables councils to use any surplus from the required £150 CTRS payments to provide additional support outside the council tax system through Local Welfare or similar schemes.
- 3.2 The sum still to be allocated is £1.66m and so allocation requires Cabinet approval.
- 3.3 The Hardship Fund is available until 31st March 2021. Therefore, 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 in the period to then.

4. Alternative options considered

- 4.1 The alternative option considered was not to develop an approach to distributing the remaining Hardship Fund, which would result in c.£1.66m of hardship grant not being made available to Haringey residents in need of support.

5. Background

- 5.1 The Government announced in the Budget on 11 March 2020 that it would provide local authorities in England with £500m of new grant funding to support economically vulnerable people and households in their local area. Haringey's allocation of this Hardship Fund was £3,663,000.
- 5.2 A Leader's Urgent Decision on 6th April 2021, set out the Council's approach to distributing the fund through the Council Tax Reduction Scheme (CTRS) mechanism, in line with government guidance. This approach was to implement a reduction of £150 on the annual tax bill to all who were at the time within Haringey's CTRS. Where a taxpayer's liability for 2020-21, following the application of council tax support, was less than £150 then their liability was reduced to nil. The same reductions have been applied to anyone moving into the CTRS during 2020/21. Any subsequent changes to a taxpayer's individual circumstances, which means they no longer qualify for the CTRS, have had this additional reduction adjusted pro-rata to the number of days they were eligible for CTRS.
- 5.3 Government guidance states that surplus grant following distribution as per paragraph 5.2 can be used to provide support outside the Council Tax system. £405,000 of the remaining fund was distributed through a Christmas Emergency Welfare Assistance Scheme and to support disadvantaged Haringey children's access to online learning as set out in the appended report. This report asks for a decision to approve distribution of the remaining £1.66m as set out in the schedule below. In making this decision, the Council has taken into account the need to:
 - target funds to address hardship
 - make the administrative process as simple as possible, so as not to unnecessarily prevent people in need from benefiting

- support specific groups of people where it is reasonable to assume Covid-19 has had a disproportionate impact
- ensure any payment made is sufficient to make a difference to the recipient/s

5.4 Details of the proposed allocation of the remaining fund in line with these objectives area set out in the appended paper. The proposed allocation is set out in the table below.

Govt allocation	£3,663,000
Expenditure to date	
CTRS	£1,597,000
Christmas Emergency Welfare Assistance Scheme	£205,000
Children's digital learning	£200,000
	£2,002,000
Remaining monies	£1,661,000
Proposed expenditure	
Direct support to families with children in hardship	£729,000
NRPF families	£9,000
Other relief support	£81,000
Digital inclusion fund	£100,000
3 District charities	£100,000
Food network	£105,000
Pilot Local Welfare Assistance Scheme	£187,000
Support for people in debt	£50,000
Discretionary Housing Payments - to support current demand to end of March 2021	£300,000
	£1,661,000

6. Statutory Officer Comments

6.1 Finance

6.1.1 The approach proposed within this report is consistent with the government's guidance to local authorities on the use of this grant, and the proposed spend on initiatives will remain within Haringey's grant allocation of £3.663m.

6.2 Legal

6.2.1 The Head of Legal & Governance (interim) has been consulted in the preparation of this report, and makes the following comments.

6.2.2 The Council is able to rely on a number of powers as the bases for taking the proposed decisions. These include, in particular, the 'general power of competence' conferred by Section 1 of the Localism Act 2011. This is a very broad based power which allows local authorities to do anything that an individual generally may do. The power is subject to exceptions and limitations, but officers do not consider that they impact on what is proposed.

6.2.3 In March 2020, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government issued a document entitled Council Tax: COVID-19 hardship fund 2020-21 – Local Authority Guidance.

6.2.4 Whilst primarily aimed at using the grant funding announced to provide council tax relief, alongside existing local council tax support schemes, the guidance went on to make clear that *“Having allocated grant to reduce the council tax bill of working age LCTS recipients by a further £150, billing authorities should establish their own local approach to using any remaining grant to assist those in need”*.

6.2.5 The guidance also went on to state that *“In determining any broader approach to delivering support, authorities are best placed to reflect on the financial needs of their most vulnerable residents. In doing so, they may wish to consider using their remaining grant allocation as part of wider local support mechanisms. These may include, but are not restricted to:*

- *Council tax relief using existing discretionary discount/hardship policies (adapted where necessary in order to capture those most likely to be affected by COVID-19); and*
- *Additional support outside the council tax system through Local Welfare or similar schemes;*
- *A higher level of council tax reduction for those working age LCTS recipients whose annual liability exceeds £150”*.

6.2.6 It is understood that the options listed in the table at paragraph 5.3 above all fall within option (b): additional support outside the council tax scheme, but if that is not the case, then as stated the options are merely indicative not prescriptive in terms of how any remaining funding is to be distributed.

6.2.7 It is further understood that the agreement of the Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee to this being a decision which is urgent and cannot reasonably be deferred has been obtained pursuant to Part Four, Section D, Rule 17.1 of the Council’s Constitution. Further, there is an intention to publish and make available to the public a notice pursuant to Rule 17.3.

6.2.8 Accordingly, there is no legal reason why the Cabinet Member cannot adopt the Recommendations contained in this report.

6.4 Procurement

6.4.1 There are no procurement implications arising from this report. Awards to the District Charities will be made on a grant funding basis and therefore sit outside of procurement regulations.

6.5 Equalities

6.5.1 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 protected characteristics and people who do not
- Foster good relations between people who share those characteristics and people who do not.

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

6.5.3 The objective of the proposed decision is to provide additional assistance to residents who are facing temporary financial crisis and hardship as a result of Covid-19. The decision on which resident groups to target with support has been informed by data and intelligence about the impact of the pandemic, including the Council's Community Impact Assessment (CIA), including an assessment of how best to reach and support these residents. This decision is therefore anticipated to have a positive equalities impact and will help to address the disproportionate economic impact of Covid-19 on groups with protected characteristics.

7. Use of appendices

Appendix 1: Hardship Fund Distribution

Appendix 2: Hardship Fund Distribution Schedule

8. Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985

None

This page is intentionally left blank

Appendix 1: Hardship Fund distribution

Introduction

1. This document sets out Haringey Council's approach and schedule for distributing its remaining Hardship Fund allocation for financial year 2020/21.

Background to Hardship Fund

2. The Government announced in the Budget on 11 March 2020 that it would provide local authorities in England with £500m of new grant funding to support economically vulnerable people and households in their local area. Haringey's allocation of this Hardship Fund was £3,663,000.
3. A Leader's Urgent Decision on 4th April, set out the Council's approach to distributing the fund through the Council Tax Reduction Scheme (CTRS) mechanism, in line with government guidance. This approach was to implement a reduction of £150 on the annual tax bill to all who were at the time within Haringey's CTRS. Where a taxpayer's liability for 2020-21, following the application of council tax support, was less than £150 then their liability was reduced to nil. The same reductions have been applied to anyone moving into the CTRS during 2020/21. Any subsequent changes to a taxpayer's individual circumstances, which means they no longer qualify for the CTRS, have had this additional reduction adjusted pro-rata to the number of days they were eligible for CTRS.
4. The Government's guidance on use of any outstanding Hardship Fund money is clear, but also permissive:

Having allocated grant to reduce the council tax bill of working age LCTS recipients by a further £150, billing authorities should establish their own local approach to using any remaining grant to assist those in need. Billing authorities will want to revisit their broader approach at intervals during the financial year, in order to ensure expenditure for 2020-21 remains within their allocation. In determining any broader approach to delivering support, authorities are best placed to reflect on the financial needs of their most vulnerable residents. In doing so, they may wish to consider using their remaining grant allocation as part of wider local support mechanisms. These may include, but are not restricted to:

Council tax relief using existing discretionary discount/hardship policies (adapted where necessary in order to capture those most likely to be affected by COVID-19);

Additional support outside the council tax system through Local Welfare or similar schemes;

A higher level of council tax reduction for those working age LCTS recipients whose annual liability exceeds £150.

Objectives for allocation and distribution of the remaining Hardship Fund

5. In defining the distribution of the remaining £1.66m from the Hardship Fund, the Council has taken into account and balanced several factors:
 - The need to target funds to address hardship
 - Making the administrative process as simple as possible, so as not to unnecessarily prevent people in need from benefiting – e.g. using direct payment mechanisms where feasible and appropriate in order to avoid the deterrent of complicated application and decision mechanisms

- Supporting specific groups of people where it is reasonable to assume Covid-19 has had a disproportionate impact
 - Ensuring any payment made is sufficient to make a difference to the recipient/s – i.e. distributing the ring-fenced fund across a large number of households without diluting individual sums to such a degree that impact in each case is minimal
6. Specifically, therefore, the main areas of focus for the distribution of the remaining funds are:
- Vulnerable families with children
 - Families where domestic abuse has been identified
 - Vulnerable adults
 - Street homelessness
 - Avoiding eviction
 - Children’s access to learning
 - Addressing exclusion from digital access to hardship support
 - Support to mitigate debt
 - Access to food
 - Access to emergency support

Previous distribution of remaining Hardship Fund

7. In December 2020, some of the remaining Hardship Fund was made available to vulnerable households over the Christmas period via the implementation of an Emergency Local Welfare Assistance Scheme (ELWAS). The ELWAS was put in place in recognition of the financial impacts of the COVID-19 crisis and the reduced capacity of key support services during the holiday period, just as London entered Tier 3 restrictions. This scheme had seven elements.
- **A financial hardship fund of last resort** enabling social workers to get essential items for living to vulnerable families over the Christmas period
 - £150 support payment to **care leavers** in recognition that care leavers did not benefit from the £150 CTRS-based initiative.
 - £150 support payment to **families where domestic abuse has been identified**
 - **A support payment to women and children in commissioned refuge spaces and emergency temporary accommodation**
 - **Support for vulnerable adults** through Homes for Haringey and Adult Social Care teams administering a discretionary financial hardship fund of last resort
 - A £50 one-off **Hardship Payment to each person in emergency and interim accommodation** during Christmas.
 - A fund to **support people accessing Mulberry Junction service to alleviate some of the financial burdens** that make the Christmas period especially challenging for vulnerable people.
8. The total sum allocated through these mechanisms was £205,000.
9. In January 2021, a further £200,000 of the remaining Hardship Fund was committed to support the purchase of 800-1000 devices plus connectivity **to help Haringey’s disadvantaged children access learning online.**

Allocation of remaining Hardship Fund

10. The maximum spend available from the Hardship Fund, allowing for expenditure in paragraph 7 above, is £1,661,000. Outlined below is the allocation for each element of this remaining sum. Allocations allow for the Director for Customers, Transformation and Resources, in consultation with the Leader of the Council to re-distribute funding between the headings below according to emerging need.

Support for families with children in hardship

Temporary hardship fund to be administered via schools

Other forms of relief support

Total of £80,000

Direct support to NRPF families - £9,200

A direct payment of £100 per child to each of the 92 NRPF families known to the Council

Enhanced digital inclusion Fund - £100,000

Enhancement of the £200,000 expenditure on supporting children's digital learning in recognition of the potential for further need in this area as well as support for adults at risk of exclusion from support due to lack of digital access.

Support for emergency need via Haringey's District Charities - £100,000

Tottenham District Charity, Hornsey Parochial Charities, and Wood Green District Charity distribute emergency support to residents on application. This fund will be distributed to the three charities to enable them to increase the numbers of people supported.

Access to food - £105,000

To be distributed direct to Haringey's foodbanks to sustain supply and to support food availability to people who are street homeless.

Pilot Local Welfare Assistance Scheme - £187,000

In February, Cabinet approved the establishment of a Haringey Local Welfare Assistance Scheme, from 1st April 2021. This fund will enable the early formation of that scheme, providing for emergency need administered by the Council.

Advocacy support for people in debt - £50,000

In February, Cabinet approved a new Debt Strategy for Haringey. This fund is an immediate response, providing for advocacy support for people in debt in the borough, in order to prevent eviction and further deterioration in household finances for families in hardship once current Covid restrictions are relaxed.

Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs) - £300,000

On current trajectory, with the increased demand as a result of Covid-19, the Council expects this fund to be exhausted by early March. The £300,000 will enable residents to continue to access this fund until the end of March, when the Council should be in receipt of its 2021/22 allocation.

Appendix 2: Hardship Fund distribution schedule

Govt allocation	£3,663,000
Expenditure to date	
CTRS	£1,597,000
Christmas Emergency Welfare Assistance Scheme	£205,000
Children's digital learning	£200,000
	£2,002,000
Remaining monies	£1,661,000
Proposed expenditure	
Direct support to families with children in hardship	£729,000
NRPF families	£9,000
Other relief support	£81,000
Digital inclusion fund	£100,000
3 District charities	£100,000
Food network	£105,000
Pilot Local Welfare Assistance Scheme	£187,000
Support for people in debt	£50,000
Discretionary Housing Payments - to support current demand to end of March 2021	£300,000
	£1,661,000