

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