

Report for: Leader of the Council

Title: **Household Support Fund in Haringey**

Report

Authorised by: Charlotte Pomery, Assistant Director Commissioning

Lead Officer: Thomas Skeen, Assistant Director of Finance

Ward(s) affected: All

Report for Key/

Non Key Decision: Key Decision

## **1. Describe the issue under consideration**

- 1.1 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 has now announced that the Household Support Fund will be extended for the period 1<sup>st</sup> April – 30<sup>th</sup> September 2022. The objective of the Scheme is 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 are responsible for administering the Scheme and funding has been allocated to each authority. Haringey Council has been allocated £2,406,671.72 for the six month period April – September 2022.
- 1.2 The funding will 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 is seeking Leader approval for the proposed arrangement for the initial spend of funding as set out in the policy document (attached), which is within the conditions stipulated by DWP. This decision will be followed by a second decision to allocate the remaining funding available.

## **2. Recommendations**

It is recommended that the Leader:

- 2.1.1 Approves the additional Housing Support Fund allocation from the Government of £2,406,671.72 for the period April – September 2022.
- 2.1.2 Approves 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.
- 2.1.3 Delegates 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.

- 2.1.4 Agrees that this policy is subject to the availability of government funding and will terminate on 30<sup>th</sup> September 2022 unless terminated earlier
- 2.1.5 Notes that a further set of recommendations for spend of the existing funding will come forward in due course and within the requirements of guidance.

### **3. Reasons for decision**

- 3.1 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.
- 3.2 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.
- 3.3 The Household Support Fund payments are expected to support households over the grant period and for all funding to be spent between 1<sup>st</sup> April 2022 and 30<sup>th</sup> 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.

### **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.
- 4.2 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.

### **5 Background**

- 5.1 On 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2022 the government announced an extension of the Household Support Fund making £421m available to County Councils and Unitary Authorities in England. The objective of the Fund is to provide support to vulnerable households in most need to help with significantly rising living costs. The expectation is that the Fund should primarily be used to support a broad cross section of vulnerable households in

most need particularly those including children, low income households and pensioners who may struggle to meet the cost of energy, food and other essential living needs.

- 5.2 Local Authorities have been given the discretion to decide how this funding should be used provided it is within the scope of the guidance. Authorities have the ability to deliver the scheme through a variety of routes including providing vouchers to households, making direct provision of food or goods or issuing grants. The council is aware that the impact of the pandemic has exacerbated existing inequalities in the borough, including income and financial insecurity. Therefore, the initial tranche of funding support under the Scheme will be focused on households with children receiving Free School Meals. They will be provided with Free School Meals vouchers during the May 2022 half term. A separate decision is to be made on the next tranche of support to be provided under the Scheme using the additional funds available.
- 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 1<sup>st</sup> April 2022 to 30<sup>th</sup> September 2022 to meet essential needs and help those who are struggling to afford energy, food and utility bills and other related essentials.
  - In exceptional cases of genuine emergency, the funding can additionally be used to support housing costs where existing housing support schemes do not meet this exceptional need, subject to conditions set out in the guidance.
- 5.3 The draft guidance currently proposes that (final guidance has not been published at the time of writing), local authorities are permitted to allocate funding to support vulnerable households within the scope of:
- At least 33.3% of the total funding will be ring-fenced to support families with children, and 33.3% of the funding will be ring-fenced to support pensioners and 33.3% to other households genuinely in need of support
- 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 The proposed Household Support Fund April 2022 attached at Appendix 1 sets out the details of the additions to the scheme to be applied in Haringey which will cover the period 1<sup>st</sup> April 2022 through to 30 September 2022. in line with national funding guidance and to address local need. Payments will provide additional support to families over the May half term holidays who might otherwise struggle to afford basic supplies. This support will be delivered alongside the Council's holiday activity programme which provides enrichment activities and a lunchtime meal to school aged children. As part of the Council's overarching approach to supporting those in need, we continue to adopt a strengths based methodology which seeks to build routes out of poverty for local residents where possible.
- 5.6 In Haringey, the Household Support Fund Policy April 2022 will allow for:

- Additional holiday support for households in receipt of Free School Meals during the May 2022 half term

Support will be available to households with No Recourse To Public Funds in line with relevant guidance.

## **6 Contribution to strategic outcomes**

- 6.1 This Household Local Support Fund Policy April 2022 helps meet the priorities and outcomes of Haringey's Borough Plan 2019-2023 and supports efforts to mitigate the impact of Covid-19 in the local community.

## **7 Statutory Officer Comments**

### **7.1 Finance**

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 draft grant conditions. Whilst the final grant conditions were not available at the time of writing it is not anticipated likely that the final grant conditions would change such that the provision of free school meals vouchers during school holidays would be inconsistent with the grant guidance.

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 (under the Household Support Fund ) 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 letter to local authorities Chief Executives and Finance Officers dated 31 March 2022, the draft Household Support Fund Grant Determination 2022: No 31 and, the draft Household Support Fund: (1 April 2022 to 30 September 2022)-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 grant funding conditions are met. The Council must ensure at least one third of the total funding must be spent on families with children and at least one third must be spent on pensioners. In terms of type of support, the expectation is that the grant is used to support households with the costs of food, energy and water bill and other essential living needs in accordance with the Scheme guidance. The proposed policy to initially allocate funding to households with children through the free school meals voucher for the May 2022 half term holiday is within the scope of the draft funding guidance.

### **7.3 Procurement**

- 7.3.1 N/A

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

7.4.3 The proposed decision is to approve the Household Support Fund Scheme Policy (attached in Appendix 1), which sets out the Council's arrangement for administering part of the new funding provided by the government. In particular, this decision relates to approving the provision of additional food support for households eligible for Free School Meals up to a maximum spend of £150,000.

7.4.4 The objective of this decision is to support residents facing increased costs due to pressures on household finances, including inflation, rising energy prices, and changes to Universal Credit. This decision will affect households with children who are claiming Free School Meals. Therefore, this decision is likely to have a positive equalities impact on families on low incomes, amongst whom there are a disproportionate number of residents with other protected characteristics.

7.4.5 It is noted that by delivering this portion of the support fund as free school meal vouchers, vulnerable residents eligible for free school meal support will automatically receive this with no additional application necessary. This delivery mechanism will help ensure that everyone entitled to this support will receive it, and no one will miss out due to challenges accessing it.

7.4.6 It is noted that a further decision will be sought on the disbursement of the remainder of the Haringey Council allocation from the Household Support Fund. This decision will include further details about how the Council intends to support other groups facing financial pressures. These other groups vulnerable to the cost of living crisis also represent a disproportionate number of residents with protected characteristics, and as such future decisions about the remainder of the fund are likely to have a positive equalities outcome .

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.

## Use of appendices

Appendix 1: Household Support Fund

**8 Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985**

Not Applicable