

Report for: Cllr Chandwani, Cabinet Member for Tackling Inequality and Resident Services

Title: **Household Support Fund in Haringey**

Report

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Lead Officer: Sara Sutton, Strategic Lead for Community Enablement

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 1st April – 30th 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. In April a decision was taken to allocate an initial tranche of the funding to provide Free School Meals vouchers during the May 2022 half term.
- 1.3 This decision will approve the remaining £2,256,671.72 of the allocation.

2. Recommendations

It is recommended that the Cabinet Member for Tackling Inequality and Resident Services:

- 2.1.1 Approves the expenditure of the remaining sum of the Household Support Fund allocation from the Government of £2,256,671.72 for the period April – September 2022.
- 2.1.2 Approves the Household Support Fund Scheme Policy: June 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 Director for Adults, Health and Communities, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Tackling Inequality and Resident Services, 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 30th September 2022 unless terminated earlier.

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 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. This report and the policy at Appendix 1 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 funding to be spent between 1st April 2022 and 30th September 2022. There is a need for an urgent decision to be taken on the recommendation in order to ensure that the payments are made to support vulnerable people within the allotted time and in particular where funding will be used in the summer 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.

4 Alternative options considered

- 4.1 The alternative option considered was not to develop a Household 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 On 23rd 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. In late May 2022 the government announced that there would be a further extension to the Household Support Fund to cover the period October 2022 – March 2023. No details have been published to date about this further extension, and further decision making will be taken later in the year upon publication of the grant conditions and guidance to local authorities.
- 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 and the cost of living crisis has exacerbated existing inequalities in the borough, including income and financial insecurity.

- 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 1st April 2022 to 30th 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 guidance currently proposes that local authorities are permitted to allocate funding to support vulnerable households within the scope of:
- At least one third of the total funding will be ring-fenced to support families with children, at least one third of the funding will be ring-fenced to support pensioners with up to one third of the total funding to other households genuinely in need of support. This may include households not currently in receipt of DWP welfare benefits.
- 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 or conduct a benefit check unless this specifically forms part of the Authority's local eligibility criteria.
- 5.5 The proposed Household Support Fund Policy, June 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 1st April 2022 through to 30 September 2022, in line with national funding guidance and to address local need. 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. The Council has undertaken a needs assessment attached in Appendix 2, that has supported the development of this policy.
- 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 2022 summer term
 - A £100 payment to
 - Families in financial stress with children ineligible for Free School Meals
 - Low-income households with children under 5
 - Low-income pensioners households
 - Families in financial stress with a disabled family member
 - Care leavers

- An allocation to the Haringey Support Fund to target support to households with disabled individuals with additional needs or more than 1 disabled individuals in the households, carers and other individuals in financial distress
- Financial support will also 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

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 Household Support Fund Grant Determination 2022: No 31/3096 and, the Household Support Fund (1 April 2022 to 30 September 2022) final guidance for county councils and unitary authorities in England dated 29th April 2022 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 proposed policy is within the scope of the draft funding guidance. At least one third of the total funding must be ring fenced to support households with children, at least one third must be spent on pensioners with one third of the total funding to other households genuinely in need of support. This may include households not currently in receipt of DWP welfare benefits. 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.

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 following on from the decision in May to use £150,000 to fund free school meals, sets out the Council's arrangement for administering the rest of the £2,406,671.72 of the new funding provided by the government.

7.4.4 The objective of this decision is to support residents facing increased costs due to pressures on household finances, including inflation and rising energy prices. This decision will affect households with children, with someone of pension claiming age or with an individual with a disability. 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 support will be targeted to residents known to the Council and partners as in need and that a variety of delivery mechanisms (Free school meals, proactive payments and applications and support via the Haringey support fund) 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. Residents in receipt of this support will also be given targeted advice to maximise their benefit payments which will lead to more positive outcomes.

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 and targeted payments to those who are not FSM eligible); socioeconomically disadvantaged residents (identified using LIFT data), BAME people who are overrepresented in the NRPF cohort, care leavers, 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 government funding and criteria availability. With currently available criteria there are no expected negative equalities consequences arising from this decision.

Use of appendices

Appendix 1: Household Support Fund

Appendix 2: Needs Assessment

8 Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985

Not Applicable