

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

Item number: n/a

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 Fund was extended with a second round of funding allocated for the period 1st April – 30th September 2022. On the 30th September 2022, in view of the cost of living crisis, the government extended The Fund again, to cover the period 1st October 2022 – 30th March 2023. The objective of The Fund is to provide support to a wide range of low income households in need including families with children, pensioners, unpaid carers and disabled people, with an emphasis on supporting households with energy, food and water bills. Local authorities are responsible for administering The Fund in their area. Haringey council has been allocated £2,406,671.72 for the six month period October 2022 – March 2023.
- 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 continue and expand its support to households in food or fuel poverty. This report is seeking 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 Cabinet Member for Tackling Inequality and Resident Services:

- 2.1.1 Approves the additional Housing Support Fund allocation from the Government of £2,406,671.72 for the period October 2022 – March 2023.
- 2.1.2 Approves the Household Support Fund Scheme Policy: October 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 Communities and Housing Related Support 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 March 2023 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, within the conditions set out by the 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 Fund, 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 1st October 2022 – 30th March 2023. The Council has identified that the cohort of low income households with children, who are eligible to receive free school meals vouchers, will be particularly impacted by the challenges presented by the significantly rising cost of living. Without support over the school holiday period, children in these households will not be able to access free meals. There is a need, therefore, for an urgent decision to be taken on the recommendations contained in this report, in order to ensure that payments are made to support families with children, to continue to access Free School Meals vouchers during the October 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 the funds available to support 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 final guidance was only received on 30th September 2022 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 30th September 2022, the government confirmed the 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 including families with children of all ages, pensioners, unpaid carers, care leavers and disabled people.

- 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 support 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 will be focused on households with children receiving Free School Meals. They will be provided with Free School Meals vouchers during the October 2022 half term. A separate decision is to be made on the next tranche of support to be provided, using the additional funds available.
- 5.2 When administering The Fund, Local Authorities are encouraged to adopt the following principles:
- Use discretion on how to identify and support those in need
 - Use the funding from 1st October 2022 – 30th March 2023 to meet immediate needs and help those who are struggling to afford energy and water bills, food 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 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. In addition, authorities must operate an application-based service for support to ensure those in need have a route to emergency support. Authorities are expected to establish eligibility criteria for their application service and should communicate with residents to ensure that their scheme and mechanism for applying is clear and accessible. There is no requirement for Authorities to undertake a means test.
- 5.4 Authorities should particularly consider how they can support those vulnerable households who are ineligible for other government support with the cost of living, including the:
- Energy Bills Support Scheme and the equivalence package confirmed on 29 July 2022
 - Council Tax Rebate and the associated £144 million Discretionary Fund
 - Cost of Living Payments for those on means tested benefits
 - £150 Disability Cost of Living Payment
 - One-off £300 Pensioner Cost of Living Payment (through the Winter Fuel Payment)
- 5.5 The proposed Household Support Fund Policy October 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 from 1st October 2022 – 30th March 2023 in line with national funding guidance and to address local need. Payments will provide additional support to families over the October half term holidays who might otherwise struggle to afford

basic supplies. As part of the Council's overarching approach to supporting those in need during the cost of living crisis, 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 October 2022 will allow for:
- Additional holiday support for households in receipt of Free School Meals during the October 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 October 2022 helps meet the priorities and outcomes of Haringey's Borough Plan 2019-2023 and supports efforts to mitigate the impact of the cost of living crisis in the local community.

7 Statutory Officer Comments

7.1 Finance

The council is proposing to put in place measures to spend the additional Housing Support Fund allocation from the Government of £2,406,671.72 for the period October 2022 – March 2023 in line with the grant conditions. The current grant guidance is in draft. However, it is not anticipated that the final conditions will differ significantly to have a material change on the proposals or the financial implications thereof.

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 30 September 2022, the Household Support Fund No.3 Grant Determination 2022: No 31/6300 and Household Support Fund: (1st October 2022 – 30th March 2023)- Guidance for County Councils and Unitary Authorities in England sets out the conditions for the grant funding. In determining the arrangements for the Scheme, the authority must ensure that the grant funding conditions are met.

The Fund is intended to cover a wide range of low income households as set out in the guidance. Support is not restricted to vulnerable households in receipt of benefits but should also include support to those vulnerable households who are ineligible for other government support with the cost of living. The guidance sets out the types of support which includes energy and water, food, essentials linked to energy and water and wider essentials not linked to energy and water if the authority considers it appropriate for their area.

The Fund cannot be used to provide mortgage support but homeowners could qualify for support with energy, food and wider essentials as defined in the guidance.

Authorities have the flexibility within The Fund to identify which vulnerable households are most in need and apply their own discretion when identifying eligibility. However, authorities are also required to also operate part of their scheme on an application basis, with clear eligibility criteria communicated to residents, which allows residents to come forward and ask for support. The authority must make public, their plans for The Fund including placing it on their website.

The proposed policy to initially allocate funding to households with children through the free school meals voucher for the October 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. This decision relates to approving the provision of additional food support for households eligible for Free School Meals during the October Half Term holidays 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 resident's 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 October 2022

8 Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985

Not Applicable