

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: David Graaff, Head of Service Delivery

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, and extended in six-month periods up to and including the 31st March 2023. In February 2023, the DWP announced that the scheme would be extended for a further 12 months for the period 1st April 2023 – 31st March 2024
- 1.2 Local authorities are responsible for administering The Fund in their area. Haringey council has been allocated £4,813,343.44 for the 12-month period.
- 1.3 The objective of The Fund is to provide support to households in the most need; particularly those who may not be eligible for the other support government has recently made available but who are nevertheless in need and who require crisis support. The Fund is intended to cover a wide range of low-income households in need including families with children of all ages, pensioners, unpaid carers, care leavers and disabled people, with an emphasis on supporting households with energy, food, and water bills.
- 1.4 The Household Support Fund will allow the Council to continue and expand its support to households in most need. This report is seeking approval for the allocation of this funding to provide Free Schools Meal (FSM) Vouchers to households with children who are eligible for free school meals during the October half term 2023, and to allocate £258,000 funding to the Haringey Support Fund.
- 1.5 The Household Support Fund Scheme Policy: March 2023 Phase 1, sets out the Council's arrangement for administering the first part of The Fund, which is within the conditions stipulated by DWP. This decision will be followed by a further decision to approve the allocations policy for the next phase of The Fund.

2. Recommendations

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

- 2.1.1 Notes the Household Support Fund allocation from the government of £4,813,343.44 for the period 1st April 2023 to 31st March 2024.
- 2.1.2 Approves the initial allocation of this funding to provide Free Schools Meal (FSM) Vouchers to households with children who are eligible for free school meals during the October half term 2023, and to allocate up to £258,000 funding to the Haringey Support Fund.
- 2.1.3 Notes that a further set of recommendations for spend of the remaining funding will come forward shortly, within the conditions set out by the guidance.
- 2.1.4 Delegates authority to the Assistant Director Resident Experience 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.
- 2.1.5 Agrees that this policy is subject to the availability of government funding and will terminate on 31st March 2024 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 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 April 2023 – 31st March 2024. 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 school holiday period.

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.
- 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 in late February 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 In February 2023, the government confirmed the extension of the Household Support Fund making £842m 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.
- 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 April 2023 – 31st March 2024 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:
- Amended Energy Price Guarantee from April 2023
 - up to £900 in Cost-of-Living Payments for those on eligible 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 2023 is attached at Appendix 1 sets out the details of the second phase of the scheme to be applied in Haringey to address local need. Vouchers 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.

6 Contribution to strategic outcomes

6.1 This Household Local Support Fund Policy March 2023 meet the priorities and outcomes of Corporate Delivery Plan 2023/24 and supports efforts to mitigate the impact of the cost-of-living crisis in the local community.

7 Statutory Officer Comments

7.1.1 Finance

Funding for the provision of Free School Meals for the October 2023 half term (up to £150,000) and the extension of funding for the Haringey Support Fund until 31st March 2024 (up to £258,000) will be met from the 23/24 Household Support Fund grant of £4,813,343, and more specifically the half of that total which has been set aside to meet HSF policy commitments for the period October 2023 to March 2024.

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 20th February 2023, the Household Support Fund Grant Determination 2023: No 31/6496 and Household Support Fund: (1st April 2023 – 31st March 2024) - 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.

7.3 Strategic Procurement

7.3.1 Strategic Procurement note the content of the report and recommendations in section 2. The recommendation is not related to a procurement activity but to the allocation of a grant and policy.

No procurement decision is required by this report.

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. Although it is not enforced in legislation as a protected characteristic, Haringey treats socioeconomic status as a locally protected characteristic.

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 £300,000.

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 2023

8 Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985

Not Applicable