

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

Item number: n/a

Title: **Household Support Fund in Haringey April-September 2024**

Report

Authorised by: Barry Francis, Director of Environment and Resident Experience

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 periods up to and including the 31st March 2024. In March 2024, the DWP announced that the scheme would be extended for a further six months for the period 1st April 2024 to 30th September 2024.
- 1.2 Local authorities are responsible for administering The Fund in their area. Haringey council has been allocated £2,406,672 for the 6-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.

The Household Support Fund will allow the Council to continue and expand its support to households most in need. This report is seeking approval for the allocation of this funding.

- 1.4 The Household Support Fund Scheme Policy: May 2024, sets out the Council's arrangement for administering the Fund, which is within the conditions stipulated by DWP. This decision will approve the allocations policy for this phase of funding.

2. Recommendations

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

- 2.1.1 Notes the Household Support Fund allocation from the government of £2,406,672 for the period 1st April 2024 to 30th September 2024.
- 2.1.2 Approves the allocation of this funding as set out in Appendix 1
- 2.1.3 Delegates authority to the Assistant Director of Customer Services, following consultation with the Cabinet Member for Resident Services and Tackling Inequality, to amend this policy to maximise and control the distribution of the fund and 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 Delegates authority to the Assistant Director of Customer Services, following consultation with the Cabinet Member for Resident Services and Tackling Inequality, to provide Free Schools Meal (FSM) vouchers to households with children who are eligible for free school meals during the Autumn half term 2024 holidays from a future allocation of Household Support Fund, provided such an allocation is made and such an allocation is permissible under any such scheme. The vouchers are distributed by schools.
- 2.1.5 Agrees that this policy is subject to the availability of government funding and will terminate on 30th September 2024; and (in the event that government increases the funding available and/ or extends the eligible period beyond 30 September 2024), agrees that authority is delegated to the Assistant Director of Customer Service to extend this policy as appropriate.

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 who 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 2024 and 30th September 2024.
- 3.4 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.

- 3.5 The Council has also identified using its Low-Income Family Tracker (LIFT) data, the cohort of low-income residents who were not eligible for one-off support payments from Central Government in 2023/24 or have no recourse to public funds. The council recognises that these groups will be particularly impacted by the challenges presented by the significantly rising cost of living.
- 3.6 The Guidance for The Fund requires local authorities to include an application-based approach for residents and the Council proposes to achieve this requirement through the allocation of fund to its local welfare assistance scheme: the Haringey Support Fund.
- 3.7 The Council will work closely with voluntary and community sector partners to promote awareness of the application-based scheme and encourage applications from hard-to-reach communities.

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 allocate funds to voluntary and community sector partners for distribution, as has happened in the last round of Household Support Fund. This approach has been discounted as the centralised distribution of funding through the Haringey Support Fund will allow a targeted distribution of funds to those most in need. The important identification of need will still be through the participation and engagement of the voluntary and community sector, but with the administration of fund distribution borne by the council.

5 Background

- 5.1 In May 2024, 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 or to third party organisations such as schools, 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 to 30th September 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 support a wide range of low-income households, not limited to those in receipt of benefits. The Council has the flexibility within The Fund to identify which vulnerable households are in most need of support and apply its own discretion when identifying eligibility. 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, larger families, single-person households, and those struggling with one-off financial shocks or unforeseen events.

5.5 The proposed Household Support Fund Policy May 2024 is attached at Appendix 1. It sets out the details of the scheme to be applied in Haringey to address local need. 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 May 2024 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

Corporate Finance have no objections to the recommendations contained in this report and have no additional comments to add.

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 Household Support Fund Grant Determination 2024 No 31/7199 and "Household Support Fund: (1st April 2024 to 30 September 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. Non-compliance could lead to a duty to repay the grant. 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 may 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 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. Funds should be spent or committed before 30 September 2024 and cannot be carried over for future usage.

If the Council wishes to work with third party organisations (“TPOs”) to deliver The Fund, it must carry out suitable due diligence checks to ensure they are viable and able to deliver the support. So, for example, ensuring all charities are registered and taking extra caution if they are new organisations. If grants are to be paid to TPOs, then authority should be obtained and arrangements (e.g. the TPO signing an Undertaking) should be made so as to ensure that the use of the monies will be controlled and protected.

The Council’s proposed “Household Support Fund Scheme Policy – May 2024” complies with the Government Guidance on how the Grant should be used.

7.3 Strategic Procurement

- 7.3.1 Strategic Procurement have been consulted in the preparation of the report. The recommendation in section 2 is not a procurement related decision. CSO 17.1 covers the approval process for the acceptance of grants from external bodies. Strategic Procurement have no objection to the recommendation of the report which is compliant with CSO 17.1 and 9.07

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 the remaining 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, 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 this decision is on the disbursement of the remainder of the Haringey Council allocation from the Household Support Fund. This decision includes 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 May 2024

8 Background Papers

[1 April 2024 to 30 September 2024: Household Support Fund guidance for county councils and unitary authorities in England - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/121444/1_April_2024_to_30_September_2024_Household_Support_Fund_guidance_for_county_councils_and_unitary_authorities_in_England.pdf)

[Household Support Fund Grant Determination 2024 No 31/7199 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/121444/Household_Support_Fund_Grant_Determination_2024_No_31_7199.pdf)

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