

Report for: Councilor Chandwani, Cabinet Member for Resident Services & Tackling Inequality

Item number: 6

Title: Household Support Fund 6 October 2024 to March 2025

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 30th September 2024. In September 2024, the DWP announced that the scheme would be extended for a further six months for the period 1st October 2024 to 31st March 2025.
- 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: November 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 October 2024 to 31st March 2025.
- 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 Resident Experience, 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 Resident Experience, 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 Easter 2025 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 31st March 2025; and (in the event that government increases the funding available and/ or extends the eligible period beyond 31st March 2025), agrees that authority is delegated to the Assistant Director of Resident Experience 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 October 2024 to 31st March 2025.
- 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 cohorts of low-income residents who are “at risk” or “in crisis” (using its Low-Income Family Tracker (LIFT) data) or have no recourse to public funds. The council recognises that these groups will be particularly impacted by the challenges presented by the significantly higher cost of living.

3.6

3.7 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.

3.8 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 until the last round of Household Support Fund. This approach has been discounted as the centralised distribution of funding through the Haringey Support Fund allows 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. This approach was shown to be effective in the last round, with high rates of take-up.

5 Background

5.1 In September 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 October 2024 to 31st March 2025 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 November 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 November 2024 meets 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 31/7466 and "Household Support Fund: (1st October to 31st March 2025) - 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.

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 31st March 2025 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 – October 2024” complies with the Government Guidance on how the Grant should be used.

7.3 Strategic Procurement

- 7.3.1 Strategic Procurement notes the contents of this report and confirms CSO 17.1 provides for cabinet to approve the receipt of grants above £500k in accordance with 9.07.1. d).
- 7.3.2 Strategic Procurement confirms there are no procurement related matters preventing the Cabinet Member for Tackling Inequality and Resident Services approving the recommendations in paragraph 2 above.

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.
- 7.4.5 The decision will allocate an estimated £640,000 to free school meal vouchers during the school holidays. This will have a positive impact on households of low socioeconomic status by ensuring that those eligible for receipt of free school meals continue to receive support during the holiday period. This will also positively impact children in low-income families as it will increase their household's capacity to purchase healthy and nutritious food. Latest data from the Autumn 2022 school census shows that over 7,700 (27%) Haringey residents attending Haringey schools are eligible for Free School Meals (Haringey Family Hub Needs Assessment, 2023). These residents are disproportionately located in the East of the borough, where levels of financial deprivation are higher and there is an overrepresentation of non-white British residents in the population (Haringey Ward Profiles, 2024), meaning the decision will potentially have a positive equalities impact for ethnic minority groups, especially Black and Black British residents.
- 7.4.6 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.
- 7.4.7 This decision will allocate an estimated £840,000 to direct cash payments of £100 to families in financial stress with children ineligible for free school meals, pensioner households in financial distress, low-income households with children under five, care leavers and households with no recourse to public funds. This will have positive equalities impacts for low socioeconomic status households, young children and older residents. Care leavers are disproportionately male (65%) and Black or Black British (45%), so the decision will have positive equalities impacts for these groups (Haringey Family Hub Needs Assessment, 2023).
- 7.4.8 This decision will allocate an estimated £505,000 to direct cash payments of £200 to pension-age households in receipt of Housing Benefit and/or Council Tax Support who do not receive the Winter Fuel Payment and households in financial stress with a disabled family member. This will have positive equalities impacts for residents with the protected characteristics of low socioeconomic status and disability, as well as older residents.

- 7.4.9 This decision will allocate an estimated £220,000 to an application-based process for households most in need of extra support in line with eligibility criteria for the scheme. This will have a positive impact on households of low socioeconomic status who are eligible for support.
- 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 November 2024

8 Background Papers

[1st October 2024 to 31st March 2025: Household Support Fund guidance for county councils and unitary authorities in England - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/1st-october-2024-to-31st-march-2025-household-support-fund-guidance-for-county-councils-and-unitary-authorities-in-england)

[Household Support Fund Grant Determination 2024 No 31/7199 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/household-support-fund-grant-determination-2024)

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