

MINUTES OF CABINET MEMBER SIGNING MEETING HELD ON WEDNESDAY 8 OCTOBER 2025, 11:30AM – 11:45AM

PRESENT: Councillor Seema Chandwani, Cabinet Member for Tackling Inequality and Resident Services

In attendance: Greg Osborne, Head of Revenues, Benefits & Income and Nazyer Choudhury, Principal Committee Co-Ordinator

1. FILMING AT MEETINGS

The Chair referred to the notice of filming at meetings and this information was noted.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were none.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

4. URGENT BUSINESS

There was no urgent business.

5. DEPUTATIONS / PETITIONS / QUESTIONS

There were none.

6. HOUSEHOLD SUPPORT FUND: 01 APRIL 2025 TO 31 MARCH 2026

The Government, through the Department of Works and Pensions (DWP) launched the Household Support Fund in October 2021, and had extended it multiple times, covering the continuous period up to 31 March 2025. In March 2025, the DWP provided guidance that the scheme would be extended for a further twelve months for the period 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026.

Local authorities were responsible for administering the Fund in their area. Haringey Council has been allocated £4,241,687.45 for the 12-month period, which was 12% less than the funding available in the previous year.

The objective of the Fund was to provide support to households in the most need. The Fund was 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.

In May 2025, a Haringey policy for allocating the fund for 2025-26 was approved. This included an allocation of £294k for Pension-age households in receipt of Housing Benefit (HB) and/or Council Tax Support (CTS) for those who did not receive the Winter Fuel Payment. Subsequent to this, the Government announced that the Winter Fuel Payment would be reinstated for all pensioners, providing the Council with an opportunity to reallocate this funding to other things.

The Household Support Fund Scheme Policy: August 2025, attached at Appendix 1 set out the Council's arrangement for administering the Fund, which complied with the conditions stipulated by DWP. This decision would approve the allocations policy for this phase of funding.

The Cabinet Member RESOLVED

1. To note the Household Support Fund allocation from the government of £4,241,687.45 for the period 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026.
2. To approve the allocation of this funding as set out in Appendix 1 of the report.
3. To delegate authority to the Delivery Director Tackling Inequality, following consultation with the Cabinet Member for Resident Services and Tackling Inequality, to amend the 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.
4. To delegate authority to the Delivery Director Tackling Inequality, 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 2026 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.
5. To agree that the policy be subject to the availability of government funding and would terminate on 31 March 2026; and (in the event that government increases the funding available and/ or extends the eligible period beyond 31 March 2026), agrees that authority is delegated to the Delivery Director Tackling Inequality to extend this policy as appropriate.

Reasons for decision

The Guidance for the Fund allowed 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 Household Support Fund payments would support households over the grant period and all funding must be spent between 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026.

The Council had identified that the cohort of low-income households with children, who were eligible to receive free school meals vouchers, would be particularly impacted by the high cost of living. The policy allocated £1.99m for free school meals vouchers for these children over each school holiday period.

The Council had also identified cohorts of low-income residents who were “at risk” or “in crisis” using its Low-Income Family Tracker (LIFT) data or had no recourse to public funds. The Council recognised that these groups would be particularly impacted by the high cost of living. The policy allocated £1.23m to cash payments for these groups, who would receive vouchers to exchange for cash without having to apply.

The Guidance for the Fund requires local authorities to include an application-based approach for residents, which the Council achieved through funding its local welfare assistance scheme: the Haringey Support Fund. In May, due to the 12% reduction in funding available compared with previous years, and the decision to invest in vouchers to support low-income pensioners with winter fuel costs, only £300k was available for the Haringey Support Fund, which was the lowest allocation since the scheme was established. The reinstatement of the Winter Fuel Payment for all pensioners had allowed the Council to add £244k back into the scheme, bringing the total allocation up to £544k.

The Council would work closely with voluntary and community sector partners to promote awareness of the application-based scheme and encourage applications from hard-to-reach communities.

£15k of funding would also be distributed to the voluntary and community sector for the provision of warm spaces in the Winter. This provision was previously funded through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, which has now ended.

The costs of administering the scheme were under-funded in the May policy, which had been rectified in this policy by increasing the funding from £350k to £400k.

The latest data on low-income households showed that the Council would have a £66k surplus within the budget originally allocated in the May policy. This revised policy therefore allocated the £66k to the Council Tax Discretionary Hardship Fund, which offered one-off payments towards Council Tax bills for council taxpayers who were experiencing exceptional financial hardship and were therefore unable to pay some or all of their bill. The fund would cover a proportion, or all of the debt owed, by way of deduction the award of the fund from the arrears. No payment was made to the customer. The Discretionary Hardship fund was delivered through Section 13A(1)(c) of the Local Government Finance Act and the corresponding Haringey Council Tax Discretionary Hardship fund policy – see background papers – Section 13A policy 2023.

To set the budget, the Council made generous estimates about the level of uptake of the free school meals vouchers and direct cash payments, based on uptake data from previous years. Should the uptake fall below these estimates, the Council would allocate the funding to either the Haringey Support Fund, or the Council Tax

Alternative options considered

A variety of options were considered which included higher values of vouchers distributed to residents. However, these options were discounted as it would leave insufficient funding for the Haringey Support Fund, which was the application-based route required by the Fund’s rules.

CABINET MEMBER: Councillor Seema Chandwani

Signed by Cabinet Member

Date10 October 2025.....