

London Borough of



Enfield

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Report Title	Household Support Fund – Proposals for spend 1 st April 2024 to 30 th September 2024
Report to:	Councillor Tim Leaver – Cabinet Member for Finance and Procurement
Date of Meeting:	
Directors:	Fay Hammond – Executive Director, Resources and Olga Bennet – Director of Finance, Capital & Commercial, Resources
Report Author:	Marc Pruis – Head of Financial Assessment Marc.pruis@enfield.gov.uk
Ward(s) affected:	All
Key Decision Number	KD 5733
Implementation date, if not called in:	To be advised by Democratic Services
Classification:	Part I Public

Purpose of Report

- 1 To seek approval of the proposals outlined within this report that detail how the £2,847,994.64 Household Support Fund (HSF), funded by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) will be distributed in Enfield. The grant must be spent during the period 1st April 2024 to 30th September 2024.

Recommendations

- I. To note that on the 6 March 2024 in the Spring Budget the Chancellor announced that the Household Support Fund (HSF) would be extended for a further six months, from 1 April 2024 to 30 September 2024, with a further £2,847,994.64 of funding.
- II. To note there have been several changes to the guidance compared with the requirements of the previous grant.
- III. To agree that the £2,847,994.64 grant provided to Enfield Council from the DWP is distributed against key themes and the detailed breakdown of the proposals is provided within the main body of this report.
- IV. To agree to delegate to the Executive Director of Resources the decision to reallocate funding between the themes if required. The Executive Director of Resources will have the authority to vire funds between the themes of no more the 10% of the total grant value or 50% of the value of the funds allocated to a particular theme. Changes above this will require Portfolio approval.
- V. To approve the Council entering into any legal documentation needed in order to give effect to the Recommendations within this Report.

Background and Options

1. On the 6 March 2024 in the Spring Budget the Chancellor announced that the Household Support Fund (HSF) would be extended for a further six months, from 1 April 2024 to 30 September 2024.
On Monday 26 March 2024 Local authorities received final confirmation of funding allocations (DWP Grant Determination Letter) and grant guidance (Household Support Fund: Guidance for County Councils and Unitary Authorities in England (1 April 2024 to 30 September 2024))
2. 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 people with disabilities. The expectation is that The Fund should be used to support households in the most need; particularly those who are struggling to afford household essentials including energy and water bills, food, and wider essentials. Councils have discretion on exactly how this funding is used within the scope set out in the accompanying grant determination and guidance.
3. The funding allocation for this period follows previous iterations of the grant which Enfield has used to help a vast range of Enfield residents. The previous funding allocation of £5,695,989 for the period 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024 enabled us to offer:

- a) Support to schools, with vouchers, support for school uniforms and school food banks with over 61,000 households benefiting from this support
 - b) Targeted support to 5141 households on Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support, offered £250 per household, supporting households who would otherwise struggle with energy, food, and water bills.
 - c) Application-based support helped 650 households with food, white goods, energy bills and housing costs
 - d) Tea and toast sessions in the community hubs and events with money and benefit advice supported a further 4,250 households
 - e) Support to voluntary organisations who will improve the supply of food (including culturally appropriate food) to foodbanks and help the supply of food and set up for food pantries.
 - f) Supported voluntary organisations to serve hot meals in a warm space.
 - g) Financial support to those in temporary accommodation to help secure a tenancy and associated costs of moving
4. This report outlines proposals for the distribution of the Household Support Fund covering the period 1 April 2024 to 30 September 2024 and responds to the new HSF grant allocation and amended guidance, using our experience gained so far to direct the limited grant funding at those most in need, with minimal administrative burden, and by accessing the best intelligence available on how to achieve this. In addition, the proposals in this report aim to support the Council's budget sustainability. A detailed breakdown of the proposals is provided in this report.
5. The grant is to be used to support a range of core living needs including food, utility bills and in some circumstances, other exceptional needs. Subject to the agreed allocation of the funds with the DWP, the grant will be paid to the Council in instalments and distributed to residents between 1 April 2024 and 30 September 2024. The grant conditions require the Council to provide management information (MI) returns outlining spend, volume of awards and number of households helped broken down by:
- a) Household composition - households with children, households with pensioners, households with a disabled person and other households.
 - b) Category - energy and water, food excluding Free School Meal (FSM) support in the holidays, FSM support in the holidays, Essentials linked to energy and water, wider essentials, and housing costs.
 - c) Types of support – vouchers, cash awards, third party organisations, tangible items and other.
 - d) Access routes – Application-based support, proactive support and other.
6. There have been several changes to the guidance compared with the requirements of the previous grant which include:
- a) Funding for evaluation activities, including data collection (for example, quantitative surveying and/or qualitative interviewing with recipients of the fund) and analysis and report writing, will now be considered eligible spend as an administrative cost.

- b) It is mandatory that in any publicity material for the scheme, including via online channels and media releases, Authorities make clear that this funding is being provided by the UK Government. This requirement extends to other public bodies (for example, District Councils) delivering the scheme on behalf of the Authority.
 - c) Delivery plans must be signed off by your Section 151 Officer and include the information of the Section 151 Officer and responsible Cabinet Member before submission to DWP.
7. The proposals outlined within this report have been developed in line with the new grant requirements.
8. The council must prepare a Statement of Grant Usage to be submitted to the Department at a time and in a form directed by the Secretary of State. The Statement of Grant Usage must provide details of eligible expenditure in the Grant Period. The Statement of Grant Usage must be certified by the Council's Section 151 officer that, to the best of the officer's knowledge, the amounts shown on the Statement are all eligible expenditure and that the grant has been used for the purposes intended. Funds will be released to the Council in arrears.
9. There are range of considerations for the Council to ensure that the distribution of the funds is clear and transparent, but most importantly has maximum impact for those in financial hardship. The principles applied in developing these proposals included:
- a) Targeting the funding to ensure that funds are allocated to those most in need,
 - b) Ensuring that the proposed scheme allocates funding as quickly as possible,
 - c) Administering the funds as simply as possible to minimise administration burden and cost, and to provide the required record keeping as set out in the grant conditions,
 - d) Presenting a transparent scheme that can be readily explained to residents how the Council is spending the grant,
 - e) Minimising the need to claim on an individual basis thus making it easier for those at risk to get the help they need directly with dignity.
10. The proposal is that a targeted approach is applied to the distribution of the majority of the funding to individual households to ensure that funds are distributed to those households most in need. However, a mandatory claims process will also be set up to ensure those most in need that did not receive the targeted support can apply for support, giving the opportunity for benefit and debt advice with each claim made to ensure a more sustainable outcome. Residents will be signposted to the Councils Cost of Living webpage on how they can access support with the cost of living if they approach the authority to access funding if they have not been targeted. In addition, community schools will be invited to apply for funding to deliver community projects within the fund criteria. However, running alongside this using the Councils separate discretionary funding, there are support mechanisms in place for those that present themselves

to various support services, depending on their need. These services will make sure all benefits entitled to are claimed and debts checked as well as providing other advice and support. This approach of distributing funding using a combination of targeted and discretionary funding 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.

11. The eligible spend areas are set out below:

- Energy and water. The Fund should primarily be used to support energy bills for any form of fuel that is used for the purpose of domestic heating, cooking, or lighting, including oil or portable gas cylinders. It can also be used to support water bills including for drinking, washing, cooking, as well as for sanitary purposes and sewerage.
- Food. The Fund can be used to provide support with food, whether in kind or through vouchers or cash.
- Essentials linked to energy and water. The Fund can be used to provide support with essentials linked to energy and water (for example warm clothing, blankets, the purchase of equipment such as fridges, freezers, ovens, slow cookers), in recognition that a range of costs may arise which directly affect a household's ability to afford or access energy, food and water. Authorities are encouraged to consider supporting households on low incomes to repair or replace white goods and appliances with more energy efficient ones, or to invest in simple energy efficiency measures which will pay back quickly, such as insulating a hot water tank, fitting draft excluders to a front door, or replacing inefficient lightbulbs or white goods. The intention of this is to provide sustainable support which could result in both immediate and long-lasting savings for the household.
- Wider essentials. The Fund can be used to support wider essential needs not linked to energy and water should Authorities consider this appropriate in their area. These may include, but are not limited to, support with other bills including broadband or phone bills, clothing, period and hygiene products, essential transport-related costs such as repairing a car, buying a bicycle, or paying for fuel. This list is not exhaustive.
- Advice services. The Fund may be used to provide supplementary advice services to award recipients, including debt and benefit advice, where Authorities consider this appropriate. Authorities are reminded that the primary intention of The Fund is to provide crisis support for households, and we would expect any advice services to complement this. We would not expect a substantial portion of funding to be spent on advice services. We would expect to see a connection between the funding provided for advice services and the practical support provided under HSF. We anticipate that a significant proportion of this will be through signposting to existing advice services funded through other routes, such as the Help to Claim scheme which supports those making a claim to Universal Credit.

- Housing costs. The Fund can be used to support housing costs. However, where eligible, ongoing housing support for rent must be provided through the Housing cost element of UC (Universal Credit) and HB rather than The Fund. In addition, eligibility for DHPs must first be considered before housing support is offered through The Fund. The Authority must also first consider whether the claimant is at statutory risk of homelessness and therefore owed a duty of support through the Homelessness Prevention Grant (HPG). It is expected that the focus of support should be on bills and that support for housing costs should only be given where existing housing support schemes do not meet need. Beyond this, Authorities have discretion to determine the most appropriate Fund for their area, based on their understanding of local need and with due regard to equality considerations.
- Households in receipt of HB, UC, or DHPs can still receive housing cost support through The Fund if it is deemed necessary by their Authority. However, The Fund should not be used to provide housing support on an ongoing basis or to support unsustainable tenancies.
- Individuals in receipt of some other form of housing support could still qualify for the other elements of The Fund, such as food, energy, water, essentials linked to energy and water and wider essentials.
- The Fund cannot be used to provide mortgage support, though homeowners could still qualify for the other elements of The Fund (such as energy, food, water, essentials linked to energy and water and wider essentials). Where a homeowner is having difficulty with their mortgage payments, they should contact their lender as soon as possible to discuss their circumstances as lenders will have a set procedure to assist. Those who are in receipt of or treated as receiving a qualifying benefit could be entitled to Support for Mortgage Interest.
- The Fund can exceptionally and in genuine emergency be used to provide support for historic rent arrears built up prior to an existing benefit claim for households already in receipt of UC and HB. This is because these arrears are excluded from the criteria for DHPs. However, support with rent arrears is not the primary intent of the fund and should not be the focus of spend.

12. The Council is proposing to distribute the funding against several key themes as summarised in the table below:

Theme	Proposed Allocation
CTS Hardship Payments (wider essentials)	£ 550,000
Temporary accommodation relocation	£ 500,000
Application-based support (incl housing costs), Welfare advice officers x 2 and CAB officer	£ 264,859
CTS 11,000 households previously protected x £125 each	£ 1,388,135.64
Administration	£ 145,000

TOTAL	£ 2,847,994.64
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Details on each theme are provided in the sections below and in Appendix B to this report.

Wider essentials: CTS hardship applications £550,000

- With increasing costs due to the cost-of-living crisis and Council Tax bills accounting for the largest proportion of outgoings for many residents, £550,000 will be used to support those in receipt of Council Tax Support where this does not cover the full liability, and where residents can demonstrate suffering exceptional financial hardship. This will be application-based.
- This is estimated to assist at least 1,270 households with their Council Tax bill, freeing up funds to help with energy and water bills, food and other essentials.

Proactive Support (£500,000)

- Temporary Accommodation - £500,000 to support and fund necessary out of borough placements and resulting resettlement and support payments to residents and costs associated with obtaining the properties. The private rented sector in Enfield is in a serious crisis of affordability. This is resulting in increasing numbers of families in serious hardship being made homeless. There are also a vanishingly small number of properties available for the Council to house these families once they are homeless. Increasingly, placements are having to be made out of area, and even these are challenging to secure. The families require significant support in moving to alleviate distress. The fund will therefore cover the cost of relocation and associated costs, such as white goods, furniture, carpets, blinds, etc.

Application-based support (£264,859)

- This is a mandatory part of the Household Support Fund and is aimed at residents not already targeted to receive support. This will support 400 residents with up to £250 per household to support with the cost of food, water and energy bills, wider essentials, white goods and advice services. £50,000 will be used to support residents who require help with housing costs where this support cannot be provided through existing mechanisms, such as Discretionary Housing Payments.
- In conjunction with these applications, a full assessment of income maximisation will be undertaken by Welfare Advice and Debt Support Officers, to ensure that in addition to emergency support, all benefits are claimed, budgeting advice is offered, signposting is considered to provide a holistic and long-term improvement to our residents' financial circumstances.
- In addition, a debt advice officer working with the Citizens Advice Bureau will be offering advice and guidance to those identified

Households in the most need (£1,388,135.64)

- Targeted to those in receipt Council Tax support (low-income households) who are in receipt of disability benefits, have caring responsibilities or provide foster care. Many of whom are unable to take on employment or increase their income due to disabilities or caring responsibilities. This will support around 11,000 households with £125 each towards their Council Tax bill, which will be credited to their Council Tax account. This will in turn free up funds to spend on other essentials, such as energy and water bills and food.

Administration (£145,000)

- The HSF funding allocation includes reasonable administration costs to enable Authorities to deliver The Fund. Examples of reasonable costs include:
 - Staff costs – These will include the coordination of the project as well as monitoring colleague's, Financial and FOI/MEQ support
 - Advertising and publicity to raise awareness of the Fund
 - Web page design
 - Funding of vouchers administration costs
 - Small IT changes
13. Delivering the fund is resource intense, with costs primarily relating to staffing costs and include costs associated with processing and issuing vouchers and meeting the management information reporting requirements.
14. The Council's communications team will issue press releases and comms to support the grant period. In addition, Ward Councillors will receive information about the help and support available to residences through the scheme.

Preferred Option and Reasons for Preferred Option

15. No other options have been considered. The proposals have been developed based on our experience gained so far, lessons learned to target the funding to those most in need and support the Council's budget sustainability.

Relevance to Council Plans and Strategies

16. Good homes in well-connected neighbourhoods

Good homes and well-connected neighbourhoods are more than simply the bricks and mortar that dwellings are constructed from. Good homes are about the lives that people lead within those homes. The proposed

use of the DWP grant will enhance the lives of some of the borough's most vulnerable people by providing them with a means to help support them or their families over the 6 months funding period and during school holidays. By doing this, the borough's residents will be able to lead better lives in better homes.

17. Sustain strong and healthy communities

Food and warmth are a basic need for all people. The ability to have food and stay warm is essential for the health of the community, and the proposed spend outlined within this report will help those residents that are most at risk of missing these basic essential needs.

18. Build our local economy to create a thriving place

The proposals outlined within this report for the distribution of the DWP grant will ensure that those residents at risk of financial hardship will be able to spend money in the local community through the purchase of food and utilities. A proportion of the funds will be spent in shops within the borough, boosting the local economy and helping to create thriving high streets.

Financial Implications

19. The Household Support Grant allocation for 2024/25 is £2,847,994.64. This funding covers the period 1 April 2024 to 30 September 2024. The planned expenditure in the report has been allocated in line with the grant conditions. The grant will be paid to the Council in instalments in arrears and distributed to residents between 1 April 2024 to 30 September 2024.
20. The expenditure will require close and regular monitoring to ensure that the conditions of the grant are adhered to.

Implications provided by Neil Goddard (Head of Financial Strategy)

Legal Implications

21. S.1 of the Localism Act 2011 provides the Council with the power to do anything an individual may do, subject to certain limitations. This is referred to as the "general power of competence" (GPOC). A local authority may exercise the GPOC for its own purpose, for a commercial purpose and/or for the benefit of others. This GPOC provides sufficient power for the Council to enter into the grant funding arrangements with the DWP. In addition, under s.111 of the Local Government Act 1972 local authorities may do anything, including incurring expenditure or borrowing which is calculated to facilitate or is conducive or incidental to the discharge of their functions.

22. The Council must comply with all relevant guidance regarding this grant – the DWP Guidance 1 April 2024 to 30 September 2024: Grant guidance (Household Support Fund: Guidance for County Councils and Unitary Authorities in England (1 April 2024 to 30 September 2024) and any updated version. The payment of the grant is in arrears, so in the event of any non-compliance with the terms and conditions attached to the funding, there is a risk that the grant could be withheld.
23. Although the guidance makes it clear that the grant should not be used for any economic undertaking, it does envisage grants being issued to third parties, and requires local authorities to ensure that whichever way they use the funding - including where they work in partnership with others - they consider all Subsidy rules (previously State Aid). It also requires local authorities to follow government procurement procedures where relevant.
24. The guidance says that local authorities must have a clear rationale or documented policy/framework outlining their approach, including how eligibility is defined and how households access the scheme. The guidance also reminds local authorities of its Public Sector Equality duty and when considering how any support may help people facing severe financial hardship, any impact this may have on those with a characteristic protected under the Equality Act 2010. In addition, when developing a delivery framework, a local authority should ensure people are not disadvantaged or treated unfairly. It is strongly recommended that the local authority develop a published eligibility policy formulated by an equality impact assessment.

Implications provided by Clare Paine (Assistant Principal Lawyer) & Innes Deuchars (Assistant Principal Lawyer)

Equalities Implications

25. An Equalities Impact Assessment has been completed and is attached in Appendix C.
26. The implementation of the HSF is expected to have a positive impact on 13,286 eligible households. The fund is intended to support a wide range of low-income households in need, including families with children of all ages, pensioners, unpaid carers, care leavers and people with disabilities. The expectation is that the fund should be used to support households in the most need.
27. Eligibility for support from the fund is based on an assessment of need for help with food, water and energy bills, essentials linked to energy and water, wider essentials and housing costs. The focus is on low-income households and those with disabilities or caring responsibilities.
28. The Equality impact assessment has identified the following mitigating actions. A paper application is available to those unable to access our online form. Where payments cannot be made into a bank account, alternative payment options are available, such as Paypoint. Where

residents are unable to complete the form, a representative of the applicant can complete the form on behalf of the applicant.

29. The Equality Impact Assessment will be reviewed during the project period and updated as necessary for future learning.

Public Health Implications

30. The proposals outlined within this report will have positive public health benefits for a considerable number of the borough's residents, specifically those who may potentially have greater health challenges.

31. Children's health will be improved via the availability of food vouchers during school holidays and an extension of the free school meals during the spring term.

32. Families in crisis and at risk will also benefit via the payments that will help them to pay for basic needs such as food and fuel for heating. This package of measures will certainly benefit the health of some of the most deprived people in the borough

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Appendices

Appendix A: Letter from Department of Work & Pensions announcing fund extension

Appendix B: Equality Impact Assessment

Background Papers

None

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