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London Borough of Enfield

Portfolio Report

Subject: Household Support Fund – Proposals for Spend October 2022 - April 2023

Portfolio Holder: Cllr Tim Leaver

Executive Director: Fay Hammond

Key Decision: KD5518

Purpose of Report

1. To seek approval of the proposals outlined within this report that detail how to distribute the £2,847,994.64 Housing Support Fund (HSF) that is being funded by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). The grant must be spent during the period 1 October 2022 – 31 March 2023.

Proposal(s)

2. On 26 May 2022, the Chancellor announced as part of measures to provide help with global inflationary challenges and the significantly rising cost of living, that the Household Support Fund (HSF) would be extended from 1 October 2022 to 31 March 2023. On Friday 30th September 2022 Local authorities received final confirmation of funding allocations and grant guidance.
3. 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 HSF should be used to support households in the most need – particularly those who may not be eligible for the other support government has recently made available.
4. There have been several changes to the guidance compared with the requirements of the previous grant including:
 - a. removal of the requirements to ringfence of any proportion of funding for any particular cohort of people;

- b. new requirement for all Authorities to operate at least part of the scheme on an application basis i.e residents should have the opportunity to come forward to ask for support
 - c. Expectation that authorities particularly consider those groups who may not have benefitted from any of the recent cost of living support;
 - d. Additional reporting requirements.
- 5. The proposals outlined within this report have been developed in line with the new grant requirements.
- 6. It is proposed that the £2.85m grant provided to Enfield Council from the DWP is distributed against key themes as follows:
 - a. Families with Children, £1.16m,
 - b. Households in the most need, £1.00m,
 - c. Voluntary organisations to improve the supply of food, £80k,
 - d. Energy efficient appliances/light bulbs, £208k,
 - e. Community focused activities to support warm spaces and food, £200k,
 - f. Reserve to support ad hoc claims, £50k,
 - g. Safeguarding – hospital discharge, £100k,
 - h. Administration, £50k.
- 7. It is proposed to delegate to the Director of Customer Experience the decision to reallocate funding between the themes if required. The Director of Customer Experience will have the authority to vire funds between the themes of no more the 10% of the grant value or 50% of funds allocated to a particular theme. Above this will be brought back to the Portfolio holder for approval.
- 8. It is proposed that due to the allocations being confirmed on Friday 30th September the £50k purposed for October Half Term be approved outside of this DAR.
- 9. A detailed breakdown of the proposals is provided in the main considerations for the Council section of the report.
- 10. (i) The funding is subject to the terms and conditions of agreement and to authorise entry into the grant agreement with DWP
 - (ii) To authorise legal officers (where so required) to enter into legal agreement and complete all necessary legal documentation with the DWP
 - (iii) To note and agree strict compliance with all conditions included in the Household Support Fund Grant Determination Letter 31/6300 and associated terms and conditions included in Annex B to achieve the objectives of this arrangement.

Reason for Proposal(s)

11. This report outlines proposals for the distribution of the Household Support Fund covering the period 01 October 2022 to 31 March 2023. A detailed breakdown of the proposals is provided in the main considerations for the Council section of the report.
12. 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 £2,847,994.64 for the period 01 April 2022 to 30 September 2022 enabled us to offer
- a. support to schools, with vouchers, support for school uniforms and school food banks;
 - b. targeted support to 8,416 pensioner households on Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support, offered £115 per household, supporting pensioners who would otherwise struggle with energy, food, and water bills;
 - c. funding to 4,816 residents deemed to be in relative poverty using benefits data (these are households without children or pensioners). Each household was offered £85;
 - d. 645 households with children who are 0 to 5 years old (not entitled to Free School Meals), deemed in relative poverty using benefits data, were offered £85 per household;
 - 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.
13. The aim of this proposal, which responds to the new HSF grant allocation and amended guidance, is to use 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.

Relevance to the Council Plan

14. 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.

15. 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.

16. 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 most likely be spent in shops within the borough, boosting the local economy and helping to create thriving high streets.

Background

17. The continuing financial hardship facing many people has been well reported in the media in recent months in view of global inflationary challenges and the significantly rising cost of living.
18. The DWP are funding Local Authorities to administer the HSF to provide financial support to households. The expectation is that it should primarily be used to support households in the most need particularly those including children and pensioners who would otherwise struggle with energy bills, food and water bills. Energy bills may be of particular concern to low-income households during the period of the scheme and Local Authorities should especially consider how they can support households with the cost of energy.
19. 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 two instalments and distributed to residents between 1 October 2022 and 31 March 2023. The grant conditions require the Council to provide management information (MI) returns outlining spend and volumes 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.
20. The Authority 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 Authority'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.

Main Considerations for the Council

21. There are a 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 fairly 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.

22. The proposal is that most of the funding is targeted. Residents will be signposted to the Council's 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 Council's 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. In cases of crisis there may also be some assistance that can be provided via the Emergency Support Scheme (Enfield's Local Welfare Assistance Scheme) fund, but this isn't claimed or advertised and is part of the support package provided by numerous services and organisations when they feel it is needed.

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

| Theme | Proposed allocation |
|--|----------------------------|
| Families with children | £1,160,000 |
| Households in the most need | £1,000,000 |
| Voluntary Organisations | £80,000 |
| Energy efficient appliances/light bulbs | £207,995 |
| Community focused activities to support warm spaces and food | £200,000 |
| Reserve to support ad hoc claims | £50,000 |
| Safeguarding – Hospital Discharge | £100,000 |
| Administration | £50,000 |
| Total | £2,847,995 |

24. Further details on each theme is provided in the sections below.

Families with Children (£1.16m)

25. The Families with Children element would form the largest of the three themes with £1.16m of grant allocated, focusing on approximately 15,000 children eligible for free school meals and 2,000 additional children identified

by schools who would benefit from a voucher. The breakdown of the support is as follows:

- a. October half term holiday activities which would include food in a warm space £50,000;
- b. December holiday £40 food voucher total £680,000
- c. February half term holiday activities which would include food in a warm space £50,000
- d. Winter coats and shoes £300,000
- e. School Food banks £80,000

26. Half term holiday activities are purposed to support keeping young people active in a warm space but feed, this is not childcare but an opportunity for families to visit Leisure Centres, Library's and other buildings in the borough. Families will also be fed during these visits. It is purposed there would be a booking system with voucher codes to the sessions, schools would allocate the vouchers to families.

27. The food vouchers, which parents have been accessing since the start of Covid-19 lockdown, will ensure children had access to nutritious food throughout the school holidays. Food vouchers will continue to be issued via Edenred which is the system that has been since the start of Covid-19 lockdown. A handful of schools choose to purchase Supermarket vouchers and issue these to families.

28. Winter costs and shoes will be issued via schools and local uniform suppliers, the initiative has received positive feedback during the past 2 rounds have doing it and have led to positive outcomes in terms of children attendance and participation in the curriculum.

29. A total 43 schools across Enfield have school foodbanks

Households in the most need, £1.00m,

30. Funding is proposed to be targeted to those in receipt of Housing Benefit and/or Council Tax Support who may not be eligible for other support that the Government has recently made available. Support would be provided to approximately 2,000 households in the form of a £500 payment issued through the post office. The use of pre-paid cards to distribute this funding is also being considered.

Voluntary organisations to improve the supply of food, £80k

31. Funding will be provided to organisations in the Enfield Food Alliance who provide food to residents. Funding will also be provided to the five Food Pantries that operate in Enfield. This funding will support the increased access to healthier, more affordable foods for families on the lowest incomes. The funding will also enable increased access to culturally diverse foods which are not typically available in food banks.

Energy efficient appliances/light bulbs, £208k,

32. Funding is proposed to be used to fund swap shops for Energy efficient appliances.

Community focused activities to support warm spaces and food, £200k,

33. Funding is proposed to be used to support lunch clubs, sports activities and food, Warm Hubs

Reserve to support ad hoc claims, £50k,

34. Criteria to be based on households in receipt of Housing Benefit and/or Council Tax Support who may not be eligible for other government support

Safeguarding – hospital discharge, £100k.

35. Enfield safeguarding team to ensure those discharged are financially supported with fuel and food so that life-saving equipment can continue to be used, they keep warm and can eat to aid recovery after the discharge.

Administration costs, £50k

36. The HSF funding allocation includes reasonable administration costs to enable Authorities to deliver The Fund. Examples of reasonable costs include:

- a. Staff costs
- b. Advertising and publicity to raise awareness of the Fund
- c. Web page design
- d. Printing application forms
- e. Small IT changes

37. Delivering the fund is quite 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. Enfield has attempted as much as possible to minimise the administration costs previously allocated to the grant previously to maximise the funding available to support households. This is becoming increasingly difficult in view of the challenging financial environment and it is likely that further administration costs will need to be allocated against the grant moving forward.

38. A provisional amount of £50k has been included in the budget to contribute to the costs of administering the fund during the period 1 October 2022 to 31 March 2023.

Safeguarding Implications

39. It is not believed that there are any safeguarding implications from the proposals outlined within this report.

Public Health Implications

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

Equalities Impact of the Proposal

41. An Equalities Impact Assessment has been completed.

Environmental and Climate Change Considerations

42. It is not believed that there will be any environmental or climate change implications from the proposals outlined within the report.

Risks that may arise if the proposed decision and related work is not taken

43. The grant needs to be spent by 30/09/22. Management information must be provided to the DWP by 22nd July 2022 for the period 01/04/2022 – 30/06/22, and by 21st October 2022 for six months to 30th September 2022. This will ensure that spend is verified to ensure that it has been spent for its intended purpose. Any of the grant not spent by 30/09/22 and for the intended purpose would need to be returned to the DWP.
44. If the decision is taken to not benefit from this funding, then many families will struggle more than they need to. It may also impact the Council's wider budget position as families in crisis may present themselves to the Council and help may need to be funded through alternative sources.

Risks that may arise if the proposed decision is taken and actions that will be taken to manage these risks

45. Payments made by Edenred vouchers, direct payments to schools, via Paypoint (cash) or via the post office (cash) may not be redeemed in time. To mitigate this risk, targeting residents needs to be done as early as possible so that residents are contacted to make sure they benefit, or money and vouchers not redeemed can be redistributed to others.
46. The Council is spending money upfront and being paid in arrears by the DWP so risk of potential non-payment by DWP if the Council does not provide Statement of Grant Usage certified by the Council's S151 Officer.
47. Non-compliance with the grant conditions and the sanctions in place. The grant conditions state clawback provisions (condition 20) shall be triggered in the event of non-compliance with grant conditions.

48. Progress Reporting and Information Return - reports are required within certain tight timescales and if not received on time, clawback provisions can be activated.
49. Compliance with distribution of fund deadlines which, if not complied with, is also linked to clawback provisions which will be triggered.

Financial Implications

50. The Household Support Grant allocation for 2022/23 is £2.848m. This covers the period 1st October 2022 to 31st March 2023. The planned expenditure in the report has been allocated in line with the grant conditions. The grant will be paid to the Council in two instalments and distributed to residents between 01/10/22 and 31/03/23. The funds will be released to the Council in arrears.
51. The expenditure will require close and regular monitoring to ensure that the percentage allocations as per the conditions are adhered to. Where expenditure is being allocated via the voucher scheme, not all vouchers are claimed and therefore regular uptake reporting is required and spend will be based on actual uptake. This will mean that subsequent decisions may be required to reallocate funding based on uptake performance.

Legal Implications

Workforce Implications

52. There are no workforce implications from the proposals outlined within this report. The grant will be distributed via the existing workforce. Some administrative costs can be claimed, but Government expects these to be minimal to ensure the grant has maximum impact.

Property Implications

53. There are no property implications from the proposals outlined within this report.

Other Implications

54. It is not believed that there are other implications that need to be considered as part of the proposals outlined within this report.

Options Considered

55. The options outlined within the report have been developed because they are believed to be the most beneficial method of distributing the grant. However, should any element of the proposed distribution be underutilised then alternative options will be considered and agreed.

Conclusions

56. The winter of 2022 is expected to continue to be extremely challenging for those experiencing financial hardship. Rising food prices and increasing utility bills will place greater pressure on residents' finances and will result in many struggling to make ends meet this winter. The proposals outlined within this report set out how the Council believes the grant can be best used for the benefit of struggling residents.

57. It is believed that the distribution of the grant across these key themes will ensure that maximum impact is achieved.