

London Borough of



Enfield

Report Title	Household Support Fund – Proposals for spend 1 st April 2023 to 31 st March 2024
Report to:	Councillor Tim Leaver – Cabinet Member for Finance and Procurement
Date of Meeting:	19.6.2023
Directors:	Fay Hammond – Executive Director, Resources and Olga Bennet – Director of Finance, Capital & Commercial, Resources
Report Author:	Michael Sprosson – Head of Procurement Services Michael.Sprosson@enfield.gov.uk
Ward(s) affected:	All
Key Decision Number	KD 5606.
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 £5,695,989 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 2023 to 31st March 2024.

Recommendations

- I. To note that on the 17th of November 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 1st April 2023 to 31st March 2024.
- II. To note there have been several changes to the guidance compared with the requirements of the previous grant.
- III. To agree that the £5,695,989 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

- 2 On the 17th of November 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 1st April 2023 to 31st March 2024. On Monday 20th February 2023 Local authorities received final confirmation of funding allocations (DWP Grant Determination Letter) and grant guidance (DWP Guidance 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024: 'Household Support Fund guidance for county councils and unitary authorities in England Updated 21 February 2023')
- 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 Fund 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 but who are nevertheless in need and who require crisis support. Councils have discretion on exactly how this funding is used within the scope set out in the accompanying grant determination and guidance.
- 4 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 1st October 2022 to 31st March 2023 enabled us to offer:

- a) Support to schools, with vouchers, support for school uniforms and school food banks.
 - b) Targeted support to 4764 households on Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support, offered £230 per household, supporting households who would otherwise struggle with energy, food, and water bills.
 - c) 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.
 - d) Supported voluntary organisations to serve hot meals in a warm space.
 - e) Enabled the purchase of 2,800 electrical appliances and 9000 lightbulbs
- 5 The aim of this proposal, which responds to the new HSF grant allocation and amended guidance, is to use our experience gained so far and lessons learned to target the funding to those most in need and support the Council's budget sustainability.
- 6 This report outlines proposals for the distribution of the Household Support Fund covering the period 1st April 2023 to 31 March 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. A detailed breakdown of the proposals is provided in this report.
- 7 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 2023 and 31 March 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.
- 8 There have been several changes to the guidance compared with the requirements of the previous grant which include:
- a) mandatory element of application-based support delivered through the scheme is clearly advertised to residents and is available throughout much of the fund period, either continuously or in regular intervals over the course of the scheme

- b) details of the scheme must also be publicised on a dedicated website page with specific requirements set out in the guidance
 - c) funding for supplementary advice services, including debt and benefit advice, is now considered eligible spend within the HSF scheme. As the primary focus of this grant is on practical support, expenditure on such services is expected to be limited and linked to the provision of practical support
 - d) it is mandatory that in any publicity material for the scheme, including via online channels and media releases, Councils make clear that this funding is being provided by the Department for Work and Pensions or the UK Government
- 9 The proposals outlined within this report have been developed in line with the new grant requirements.
- 10 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.
- 11 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.
- 12 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. 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 is not claimed or advertised and is part of the support package provided by numerous services and organisations when they feel it is needed. 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.

13 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.

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

Theme	Proposed
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	Allocation
Families with children	£2,000,000
Households in the most need	£1,780,000
Services within LBE that provide emergency support with food, fuel, wider essentials, housing costs and help with resettlement	£ 635,989
Proactive Support	£1,100,000
Administration	£ 180,000
TOTAL	£5,695,989

Details on each theme are provided in the sections below and in Appendix B to this report.

Families with Children (£2,000,000)

- The Families with Children element would cover all school aged children attending Enfield schools, focusing on approximately 17,000 children eligible for free school meals and 3,000 additional children identified by schools who would benefit from support.
- The breakdown of the support is as follows:
 - June Half term activities and food support
 - Summer and Christmas break food vouchers
 - October Half term activities and food support
 - School uniforms
 - School food banks
 - Residential visits support
- 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.
- Schools will be issued budgets to support the purchasing of uniform and other essentials to support children accessing the curriculum, the initiative has received positive feedback during the past 3 rounds have doing it and have led to positive outcomes in terms of children attendance and participation in the curriculum.
- A total 43 schools across Enfield have school foodbanks.
- In Enfield we have an increasing number of children who are unable to attend residential visits that are part of the curriculum schools will have a budget to support or match fund what families are able to contribution to the trip.
- Families will receive a supporting letter highlighting what the funds can be used for. This letter will be branded in according with the DWP and Enfield Brand Guideline.
- Schools will be required to submit returns on the number of vouchers issued and at regular checkpoints throughout the year.

- It should be noted that £40k of the fund has been spent during the May half term.

A breakdown of spend is provided at Appendix C

Households in the most need (£1,780,000)

- Targeted to those in receipt of HB and/or Council Tax support who are not eligible for the governments cost of living payment (this cost-of-living payment is based on receiving certain DWP and HMRC (HM Revenue & Customs) benefits, but Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support alone do not qualify households for this award). Over 4,000 households currently identified as not receiving the qualifying benefits but do receive HB/CTS £250 to be paid to each of these households. HB/CTS data to be reviewed in October to identify any new claimants that fall into this category
- Hosting 4 events at various locations around the borough for Welfare Advice and debt support.
- Welfare Advice and Debt Support to support residents affected by food insecurity on Saturdays. (1100 per month – currently funded by public health but due to end soon). Already established at 2 food banks seeing 15-20 residents per month but will include drop-in sessions and appointments for on-going support. £15,000 to cover this support
- Welfare Advice and debt support officer for the year at £48,000, dealing with HSF claims process full time supporting over 600 households with an HSF payment up to £250 plus income maximisation and debt support for sustainment of support

Services within LBE that provide emergency support with food, fuel, wider essentials, housing costs and help with resettlement (£635,989)

- £600K will partly be allocated to various internal services and trusted organisations that currently support helping Enfield residents within their client groups that face a crisis within their own assessment of need plus will also support the overspend of Discretionary Housing Pay. These services and groups are:
 - Welfare Advice and Debt Support Team
 - Children's Services
 - Mental Health Enablement
 - Adult Social Care
 - Housing Floating Support
 - SOLACE
 - North Enfield Foodbank
 - Carers Centre
 - Citizens Advice

- The remainder of this £600K will also be used to cover Discretionary Housing Payments where the government allocation for the year is used up. This is to ensure homeless prevention can continue where government funding may not cover the need for the year.
- £35,989 has been allocated to the Community Hubs to deliver food pantries 4 days a week in Edmonton Green and Enfield Town Libraries and to deliver free tea and toast breakfast sessions weekly to residents in Edmonton Green and Enfield Town Libraries.

Proactive Support (£1,100,000)

- Temporary Accommodation - £1M 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:
 - Relocation payments to households (£200k) – made up of payments of £2500 to families relocating and £1000 to singles and couples relocating
 - Costs additional to rent in securing properties (£600k)
 - Continuing support to enable families to maintain tenancies (£200k)
- £100,000 to help the most vulnerable children young people and families in the Borough who are in receipt of support from Children and Family Services. The funding will be targeted to those clients who have been assessed as needing help with energy, food, housing, and wider essentials.

Administration (£180,000)

- 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

15 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.

- 16 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

- 17 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

- 18 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.

- 19 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.

- 20 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

- 21 The Household Support Grant allocation for 2023/24 is £5,695,989. This funding covers the period 1st April 2023 to 31st March 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 1st April 2023 to 31st March 2024.

- 22 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 the actual uptake of voucher and funding.

Implications provided by Neil Goddard (Head of Financial Strategy)

Legal Implications

- 23 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.
- 24 The Council must comply with all relevant guidance regarding this grant – the DWP Guidance 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024: 'Household Support Fund guidance for county councils and unitary authorities in England Updated 21 February 2023' 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.
- 25 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.
- 26 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

- 27 An Equalities Impact Assessment has been completed. Eligibility for support from the fund is based on needs and demonstrates that the project will reach a significant number of residents across the borough. Where necessary, mitigating action has been noted to avoid or counteract any negative impacts.
- 28 The Equalities Impact Assessment was completed by the business leads of this project, overseen by the Senior Responsible Officer and was signed off by the Project Executive, the Executive Director – Resources.
- 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

Report Author: Michael Sprosson
Head of Procurement Services
Michael.Sprosson@enfield.gov.uk
07802 775945

Appendices

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

Appendix B: Spend Breakdown

Background Papers

None

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