

	<b>Officer Key Decision</b>
	<b>Report from the Corporate Director of Resident Services</b>
<b>Household Support Fund extension (from October 2022 until 31 March 2023)</b>	
<b>Wards Affected:</b>	All
<b>Key or Non-Key Decision</b>	Key
<b>Open or Part/Fully Exempt:</b> <small>(If exempt, please highlight relevant paragraph of Part 1, Schedule 12A of 1972 Local Government Act)</small>	Open
<b>No. of Appendices:</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Launch letter for the Household Support Fund extension including draft allocations and grant determination criteria</li> <li>2. Household Support Fund Grant determination letter</li> <li>3. Household Support Fund guidance</li> </ol>
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## 1.0 Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 The Government announced the extension of Household Support Fund (HSF) from October 2022 to 31 March 2023. The guidance includes specific categories of support local authorities should apply for residents with the cost of living crisis.
- 1.2 External factors like the cost of living have increased demand for support and more residents need than ever before with food, fuel and utilities. The paper outlines the allocation and distribution of the HSF grant.
- 1.3 The decision will require sign-off by the Corporate Director for Resident Services through a key decision process and delegated authority.

## **2.0 Recommendations**

That the Corporate Director for Resident Services:

- 2.1 Notes that Brent's allocation for the Household Support Fund (HSF) for the period 1 October 2022 to 31 March 2023 is £2,781,222.28.
- 2.2 Approves the approach for allocating and distributing the HSF as set out in paragraph 4 of the report.
- 2.3 Notes the proposed approach whereby the Corporate Director of Resident Services in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Jobs, Economy and Citizen Experience will exercise their authority to establish detailed eligibility criteria regarding the Household Support Fund grant scheme as may be necessary to enable the appropriate allocation of funding.
- 2.4 Notes the proposed approach whereby the Corporate Director of Resident Services in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Jobs, Economy and Citizen Experience has the authority to amend the Council's eligibility criteria during the life time of this Household Support Fund grant scheme if necessary for the reasons detailed in paragraph 4, subject to the parameters set by the Department for Work and Pensions in its Determination and Guidance.

### **3.0 Details of the Household Support Fund scheme**

- 3.1 On 30 September 2022, The DWP confirmed that an additional £500 million Household Support Fund (HSF) grant would be available to all Local Authorities in England. This is the third round of HSF made available, with amended criteria attached to it.
- 3.2 The Council cannot carry over any residue of the HSF grant fund to the coming financial year.
- 3.3 The aim is to support those most in need to help with the significantly rising living costs by providing extra funds to alleviate food and fuel poverty.
- 3.4 In previous iterations of HSF, prescriptive direction has been given about how the HSF fund should be allocated to certain groups. In this most recent version, the criteria from DWP is not restricted to spend one third of funding on pensioners and families.
- 3.5 The DWP has stipulated that every local authority must operate at least part of their scheme on an application basis. In other words, residents should have the opportunity to come forward to ask for support. Brent has operated such a scheme since the start of the RSF in August 2020.
- 3.6 Local Authorities have been given the flexibility to identify those at need and have been asked to use the data and information at their disposal in order to

do this. There must be a clear rationale or documented policy/framework outlining our approach including how we are defining eligibility and how households access the scheme. Furthermore, Authorities have access to DWP's Searchlight portal and can use information relating to Universal Credit claims to aid the identification of households at need. The eligibility criteria is outlined in Section 4 of this report as part of the proposed approach for Brent.

- 3.7 Direction has been given from DWP that households who will not be awarded additional help from welfare benefits should be considered for help, alongside disabled residents.
- 3.8 There is also the requirement to make some of the fund available to residents through an application based award system, which we already have in place with our Resident Support Fund (RSF) and we propose some of the fund is added into the existing RSF and to include allocation for emergencies as per the guidance.
- 3.9 The funds must be used, or committed to by 31 March 2023. The DWP has advised that the scheme can be delivered through a variety of routes such as providing vouchers, bank transfers, making direct provision of food or issuing grants to third parties.
- 3.10 There is no requirement for the Council to undertake a means test or conduct benefit checks unless this specifically forms part of the Authority's local eligibility criteria.

#### **4 Brent's approach with support and distribution of HSF fund:**

- 4.1 **Free School Meals** –Households with children will receive £15 per week to support them outside term time. These households would receive free school meals during term times are supported during school holidays. The funding includes October half term, Christmas break, February half term and Easter Holidays. A total of six weeks of fund will be allocated. 0-4 year old children whose households are eligible for Housing Benefits will also receive the same support during the six week holiday period
- 4.2 **Support to disabled people** - The guidance makes explicit reference to support disabled residents and residents who are on Housing Benefits but have not received any support from government under other schemes.
- 4.3 £120,000 to be allocated towards food banks to allow support for our residents.
- 4.4 DWP have offered £650 per claimant on welfare benefits with cost of living of welfare benefits. The guidance advises us to support residents who are on Housing Benefits only to receive the support through HSF-£650 offer is replicated.
- 4.5 DWP guidance also suggests supporting Disabled residents. £50 per household for residents who receive Disability Living Allowance, Personal Independence payment and are in receipt of Housing Benefits or Council tax Support has been agreed to be allocated.

4.6 The below table shows the distribution of funding for each category of support and amount of fund from Household Support Fund allocated to Resident Support Fund:

Food banks (£)	HB only cases (£)	Disabled households (£)	School vouchers (£)	Allocation to RSF fund (£)	Notes
£120,000	(1000 households) £650,000	(6360 households) £318,000	(9000 children) £810,000	£802,000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• £15 food voucher for six weeks</li> <li>• £650 Housing Benefits residents-one off payment</li> <li>• £50 Residents on DLA, PIP and AA</li> </ul>

## 5.0 Financial Implications

5.1 The Council's allocation for HSF is £2,781,222.28, and must be used from 1 October 2022 and by 31 March 2023. The aim of this funding is to give vulnerable households support with the cost of living and provide extra support with food, energy, water bills and other essentials.

5.2 The allocation for spend shown above in 4.6 are within the grant allocation, so there is no risk to the Council. It is a requirement of the grant conditions to submit regular claims of any costs incurred which will be reimbursed provided they are within the permitted spend in the guidance. Any unspent funds from this allocation will not be claimed, so there will no requirement to refund any monies to the DWP.

## 6.0 Legal Implications

6.1 The funding provided under the HSF is required to be distributed by 31 March 2023 to support those most in need with the cost of food, energy, water bills and other essentials. The HSF funding must only be used to provide support as defined within the grant conditions as set out by the Department for Work and Pensions. To this end the Council is required to develop a local eligibility framework and approach. HSF funding was previously provided for the period from April 2021 to September 2022, and has now been extended from 1 October 2022 to 31 March 2023. Officers have set out a proposed approach in paragraphs 4.1 to 4.3 of the he report and will seek authority from the Corporate Director for Resident Services in consultation with the lead member for Jobs, Economy and Citizen Experience Leader to establish such detailed criteria as may be necessary to enable appropriate allocation of funding.

6.2 The extended HSF funding runs from the 1 October 2022 to 31 March 2023 and funds must be used or committed by 31 March 2023. Given the value of the HSF allocation to Brent (in the sum of £2,781,222.28), decisions by the Corporate Director for Resident Services regarding its distribution and the establishment of eligibility criteria for its distribution will be classed as a key decision.

6.3 Officers will need to have regard to the Subsidy Control regime in relation to any arrangements entered into for the distribution of the HSF.

## **7.0 Equality Implications**

- 7.1 The public sector equality duty, as set out in section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, requires the Council, when exercising its functions, to have “due regard” to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited under the Act, to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between those who have a “protected characteristic” and those who do not share that protected characteristic. The protected characteristics are age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation.
- 7.2 Having due regard involves the need to enquire into whether and how a proposed decision disproportionately affects people with a protected characteristic and the need to consider taking steps to meet the needs of persons who share a protected characteristic that are different from the needs of persons who do not share it. This includes removing or minimising disadvantages suffered by persons who share a protected characteristic that are connected to that characteristic.
- 7.3 There is a requirement to consider how the Household Support Fund impacts those with characteristics protected under the Equality Act 2010. There is no prescribed manner in which the Council must exercise its public sector equality duty but having an adequate evidence base for its decision is necessary.
- 7.4 Due to the urgency of the situation, formal assessments have not been undertaken in respect of the decisions which are the subject of this report. Such formal assessments are not a requirement of the duty. An underlying purpose of the recommended decisions is to have regard to the protection of those with protected characteristics e.g. children eligible for free school meals and families with pre-school children eligible for benefits. The proposed approach for allocating and distributing the funding recommended for adoption however, seeks to provide funding to a wide range of vulnerable households. In the circumstances, Officers do not consider that there are any adverse equalities impacts but Officers will keep the equalities impact of the decisions under review.

## **8.0 Consultation with Ward Members and Stakeholders**

- 8.1 It is not considered in the circumstances that non-statutory public consultation is a viable or reasonable option for the Council in taking the decisions which are the subject of this report, on account of the very short period which the government has given local authorities regarding the extension of the Household Support Fund grant scheme even if at other times it would have considered consultation with the public and / or stakeholders affected by the decision.

## **9.0 Human Resources/Property Implications**

9.1 It is not considered at this time that there are any Human Resources/Property/Environmental Sustainability Implications arising from decisions which are the subject of this report.

**Report sign off:**

**PETER GADSDON**  
*CORPORATE DIRECTOR FOR RESIDENT SERVICES*