



**Cabinet**  
17 April 2023

**Report from the Corporate Director  
of Resident Services**

**Household Support Fund (from 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024)**

<b>Wards Affected:</b>	All
<b>Key or Non Key Decision</b>	Key
<b>Open or Part/Fully Exempt:</b> (if exempt, please highlight relevant paragraph of Part 1, Schedule 12A of 1972 Local Government Act)	Open
<b>No. of Appendices:</b>	Three Appendix 1 Launch letter for the Household Support Fund extension including draft allocations and grant determination criteria Appendix 2 Household Support Fund Grant determination letter Appendix 3 Household Support Fund guidance
<b>Background Papers</b>	N/A
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**1.0 Purpose of the Report**

- 1.1 Cabinet is asked to note the Government announcement regarding the Household Support Fund (HSF) extension from 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024 and to agree proposals for the allocation and distribution of the HSF.
- 1.2 External factors such as the ongoing cost-of-living crisis have increased demand on Brent's Resident Support fund (RSF) with an increasing number of residents needing financial support. The paper outlines options for Cabinet to

consider for the allocation of HSF funding and consider allocating additional funds from the HSF extension to the current RSF fund.

## **2.0 Recommendations for Cabinet**

That Cabinet:

- 2.1 Notes Brent's allocation for the Household Support Fund (HSF) for the period 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024.
- 2.2 Approves the proposed approach for allocating and distributing the HSF as set out in paragraph 4 of the report.
- 2.3 Approves the proposed approach, whereby the decision seeks approval from Cabinet. Subsequently, The Corporate Director of Resident Services in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Customers, Communities and Culture will exercise his authority to establish revised eligibility criteria regarding the Household Support Fund grant scheme as may be necessary to enable the appropriate allocation of funding.
- 2.4 Approves the proposed approach whereby the Corporate Director of Resident Services in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Customers, Communities and Culture has the authority to amend the Council's eligibility criteria during the lifetime of this Household Support Fund grant scheme if necessary for the reasons detailed in paragraph 3.6, 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 The DWP confirmed that an additional £842 million Household Support Fund (HSF) grant would be available to all Local Authorities in England. This is the fourth round of HSF, with amended criteria attached to it.
- 3.2 The Council cannot carry over any residue of the HSF grant fund to the next financial year 2024/25.
- 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 such as pensioners and households with Children. In this most recent version, the funding criteria from DWP is not restricted to specific groups. Unlike previous iterations, there is emphasis on proactive and reactive support with help from partners, voluntary organisations and charities.
- 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 are 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 Brent already has in place with the Resident Support Fund (RSF) and we propose some of the fund is added into the existing RSF and to include an allocation for emergency payments to residents as per the guidance.
- 3.9 The funds must be used or committed to by 31 March 2024. 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, energy bills including gas, electric and water.
- 3.10 The funds can be used to include financial support for residents through third parties.
- 3.11 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 Proposed approach for Brent**

- 4.1 **Free School Meals** – It is proposed to help families with children who receive free school meals during term times so that they receive additional support during the school holiday periods. This includes Easter Holiday, May half term, summer holidays, October half term, Christmas break and February half term. A total of thirteen weeks. The funding allocation is based on £15.00 per week per child. Paragraph 4.10 of this report shows how we propose to allocate the funds.
- 4.2 **Support to disabled people** - The guidance makes explicit reference to support disabled residents, and residents who would not have received any support from DWP. The support from DWP currently includes the following- £900 cost of living payment for residents who are on means tested benefits, £150 Disability Cost of Living payments for disabled residents and £300 for Pensioners Cost of Living payment through Winter fuel. We allocate £50 for 6600 disabled residents as a one-off payment.
- 4.3 Below is the proposed allocation of the grant and number of households that will be supported through proactive initiatives.

- 4.4 **Housing Benefits residents** who have not received any other government grant due to the cost of living. £900 per household for 750 Households.
- 4.5 £200,000 proactive support through Food banks in Brent.
- 4.6 £250,000 allocated to our partners and voluntary organisations, charities and partners in Brent to proactively support our residents.
- 4.7 £150,000 for 150 carers housing costs
- 4.8 £2,000,000 to be allocated to Resident Support fund.
- 4.9 This matrix sets out the allocation of HSF funds for different groups of residents and the fund available for RSF for reactive support to the most vulnerable households:

<b>Type of Support</b>	<b>Number of Households supported</b>	<b>Amount</b>
Free School meals during holidays (13 weeks) £15 per week per child	7850	£1,530,750
Food vouchers for 0-4 year old during holidays (13 weeks) where parents/guardian in receipt of Housing Benefits	1740	£339,300
Emergency Super Market Vouchers	410	£87,395
Disabled residents-£50 one off payment	6600	£330,000
Housing Benefits only (no other govt grant)-£900 one off payment	750	£675,000
Local Food bank grants**		£200,000
Partners, charities and voluntary organisations	500	£250,000
Carers in Brent (Housing costs)	150	£150,000
Resident Support Fund (reactive support)	2000	£2,000,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>20,000</b>	<b>£5,562,445</b>

\*\*please note number of households supported by food banks is not included\*\*

## **5.0 Financial Implications**

- 5.1 The Council's allocation for HSF is £5,562,445, and must be used from 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024. 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 proposals for spend shown above in 4.10 are within the grant allocation, so there is no financial 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.
- 5.3 As with previous iterations of the Household Support Fund, local authorities are unable to carry forward any underspends from previous schemes.
- 5.4 Grant payments will be made to Authorities in arrears on receipt of a fully completed, compliant and verified MI return.

## **6.0 Legal Implications**

- 6.1 The funding provided under the HSF is required to be distributed by 31 March 2024 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 September 2022 to 31 March 2023, and has now been extended from April 2023 to 31 March 2024. Officers have set out a proposed approach in paragraphs 4.1 to 4.3 of the report and will seek authority from the Corporate Director for Resident Services in consultation with the lead member for Customers, Communities and Culture to establish such detailed criteria as may be necessary to enable appropriate allocation of funding.
- 6.2 The new HSF funding runs from the 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024 and funds must be used or committed by 31 March 2024. Given the value of the HSF allocation to Brent (in the sum of £5,562,445), 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 Resident Services**