

Harrow Council Consultation

Hardship Scheme

(Previously Emergency Relief Scheme)

Proposals 2016/17

22 September 2016 – 17 October 2016

Asking for public views on proposed changes to the following services:

Replacing the Emergency Relief Scheme ('ERS') with a small Hardship Fund catering for short term extreme & immediate need for food, fuel, clothing and emergency travel only.

**This consultation is available to fill out online at
www.harrow.gov.uk/ersconsultation**

Or you can send a paper response to
ERS Consultation, Civic Centre 1, Station Road, Harrow HA1 2DU

What is this consultation?

This consultation informs of the need to make savings in the Collections & Housing Benefits Service for the 2017-2018 financial year. It consults on affected services, namely on proposals for a revised Emergency Relief Scheme which will operate with reduced funds due to the need to reduce the budget in future years.

Why are you making savings?

Harrow is one of the lowest funded councils in London and a recent review identified that in 2015/16 Harrow's revenue spending power per head is projected to be £159 (or 17.3%) lower than the London average which ranks Harrow 26th out of the 32 London Boroughs. The amount of Government funding we receive continues to reduce from a total of £86.9m in 2013/14 to £42.7m in 2018/19 as a result of the national public sector austerity measures. Harrow Council will therefore have £83 million less to spend in 2018 compared with 2014. In order to be responsible and balance our books, Harrow Council has to make further savings.

Why cut public services? Aren't there better ways to save money?

Harrow Council is trying every way it can think of to protect public services – especially those needed by the most vulnerable people in our borough. In the past year, we have increased our efficiency, cut back on waste, raised taxes, created new companies to earn commercial income and begun an ambitious regeneration programme to help our borough grow.

Haven't you done enough already?

Harrow Council's total budget is £589m, but most of that must be spent on housing benefit, schools and other services that cannot be cut. The Council controls how to spend about £141m. This is where we need to find all our savings from.

How much are you taking from the Emergency Relief Scheme?

The total budget for the ERS Service is £270,000. As part of a wider saving strategy, the budget for the ERS scheme is being pooled with other Council budgets. However £10,000 is being retained to create a specific Hardship Fund from which future scheme awards will be paid. Once administration costs are taken into account it is hoped that approximately £250k will be saved.

We expect these proposals to affect a low number of members of the public directly. We need to understand how they will affect you, and find out if you know or can suggest any better or fairer ways to make these essential savings.

Why are you consulting me? Hasn't the Council already made up its mind?

The proposals in this consultation have not been decided. The move to replace the existing ERS with a Hardship Scheme is what we are currently consulting you on. However, you should bear in mind that this is on the basis that we now have less money to run the scheme than previously. The results of this consultation will help us decide what changes should be made to the criteria within the proposed policy.

We think our ideas are the best they can be, considering the financial challenges facing the Council. However, we now need your input and insight to help us make the right decisions, together, for Harrow's future.

Thank you for taking the time to help us.

How to participate in this consultation

The consultation will run for a minimum of four weeks from 22nd September 2016 to 23rd October 2016.

Consultation documents will be sent out to residents who have previously used the ERS and we will be inviting the voluntary sector to participate in workshops to feed into the consultation. The consultation will also be available online throughout the period.

The results of the consultation, together with a final scheme policy will subsequently be reported back to Council members and presented at the December 2016 Cabinet meeting for a decision to be made.

You may answer as many questions as you choose in Sections A and B.

We very much hope you can answer as many questions as possible, as we are relying on your views, ideas and experience to ensure we make the right decisions. All data will be treated equally and confidentially by the Council.

Contents

Page 5	Hardship Scheme consultation proposals
Page 6	Proposal: Stop awarding “White Goods & Furniture” and continue with small awards in extreme situations requiring short term help and where there is danger to health & safety.
Page 7	Section A: Consultation questions
Page 9	Section B: Equality monitoring questions
Attached	Proposed Hardship Scheme Policy

Hardship Scheme consultation proposals

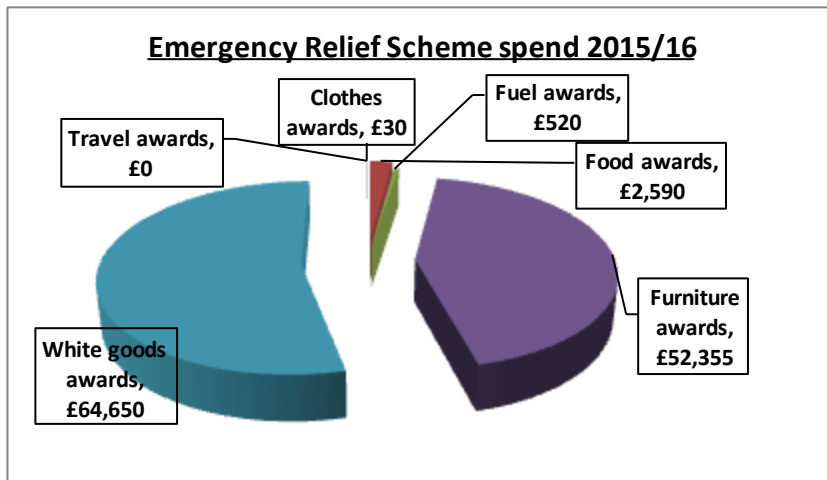
Background

The Harrow Emergency Relief Scheme ('ERS') was created to support people experiencing financial hardship. The ERS team (the 'team') initially assess applicants to identify if they are able to access the support to meet their needs by other means, such as maximising benefit entitlement. If no other support is available, the team will assess the applicant for entitlement to discretionary assistance. Emergency Relief is only available to people in receipt of means tested benefits or who have an underlying entitlement to a means tested benefit.

The team currently assesses needs against agreed criteria to understand risk to health and safety. If the applicant meets the criteria they will be provided with 'in kind' support to meet their need. Support is predominantly provided by the Council buying and delivering white goods or furniture to the applicants, such as cookers, fridges, washing machines or furniture for example. The average award is worth approximately £500-£600. Remaining awards (totalling around £6,000 of spend) are made up of a one off small cash or cash equivalent allowance, paying for utility top-ups, paying for urgent travel in emergency situations as well as purchasing food supplies.

Emergency Relief Historical data for applications for all types of awards

2015-16	ERS Award Value £	ERS Number of Awards	ERS number of Applications
April	£ 9,376.20	24	56
May	£ 14,025.04	26	53
June	£ 23,549.40	37	80
July	£ 16,998.20	27	75
August	£ 8,810.50	26	61
September	£ 10,292.50	20	54
October	£ 7,442.90	14	49
November	£ 9,122.20	21	46
December	£ 6,868.40	13	30
January	£ 7,565.80	14	44
February	£ 8,074.50	21	53
March	£ 8,124.90	18	39



Proposal: Replace the ERS with a Hardship Scheme which will stop awarding “white goods & furniture” but continue small awards for food and fuel in extreme situations requiring short term help and where there is danger to health & safety.

In order to reduce cost we are proposing to stop funding white goods, furniture and carpets and plan on retaining awards in emergency situations only e.g. supporting, in the short term, applicants in extreme financial hardship and with very severe short term needs. This will mean that awards would be a maximum of £100 (higher in exceptional circumstances) and would cater mainly for emergency electricity or gas meter top ups, clothes, travel costs or food supplies where no other assistance is available.

In order to implement this option the Council would revise the current scheme policy. Attached to this consultation document is a copy of the revised Hardship Scheme policy which removes the award of white goods, furniture and carpets as options of support. White goods, furniture and carpets accounted for 97.4% of historical spend and 66% of all applications in the last financial year.

In 2015/16 £3,000 was spent on food, fuel and clothing from the ERS. £10,000 will be made available under the new Hardship Fund, allowing for discretionary items to be awarded in exceptional circumstances

For more information about the service and the changes proposed, go to www.harrow.gov.uk/ersconsultation

Section A: Consultation questions

Please provide your name and address.

This information will be kept confidential. We will not contact you.

a. Are you aware of the existing Emergency Relief Scheme?

Yes No

b. Will the proposal directly affect you or your dependents?

Yes No

c. Do you agree that the scheme should continue to provide emergency support for food, fuel, clothing and emergency travel?

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

d. Are there any other items that you think should be included in the revised scheme?

e. Should the revised policy have a cap on the amount of financial support that can be given in a single award, for example of £100 maximum award?

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

f. Should the revised policy continue to limit the number of awards that can be paid to two a year?

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

- g. What do you think the impact will be on people who cannot access items that are currently available from the Emergency Relief Scheme such as fridges, washing machines, cookers, beds?

- h. Are there any groups of people that you think will be particularly impacted by the proposed changes to the Emergency Relief Scheme?

- i. If you or someone you know would lose access to the Emergency Relief Scheme, how would they cope and what alternatives could they find?

- j. As the funding is only able to support a much reduced alternative scheme, who should the scheme support as a priority?

Section B: Equality monitoring questions

Harrow Council has a legal responsibility to promote and advance equality. To help us to do this, it is important that we have a good understanding of our communities, how our services are being accessed and who is using or would like to use our services. With up-to-date and accurate information we are able to:

- Better understand our service users / residents and shape services to meet their specific needs
- Identify and address any barriers / issues individuals may experience when accessing our services (including information about our services)
- Ensure our policies and services are accessible to everyone who uses them

The information will also enable us to monitor our progress with regards to addressing inequality and allow our employees and service users see how we are performing on equality.

Data Protection: It is your choice whether you provide this information. Your replies will not be used in a way that identifies you.

Age

Under 16	<input type="text"/>	16 – 24 years	<input type="text"/>
25 – 44 years	<input type="text"/>	45 – 64 years	<input type="text"/>
65 & over	<input type="text"/>		

Disability – Are your day-to-day activities limited because of a health problem or disability which has lasted or is expected to last at least 12 months?

No	<input type="text"/>	Yes, affecting mobility	<input type="text"/>
Yes, affecting hearing	<input type="text"/>	Yes, affecting vision	<input type="text"/>
Yes, a learning disability	<input type="text"/>	Yes, mental ill-health	<input type="text"/>
Yes, another form of disability – please specify			

Marriage or Civil Partnership

Are you married?	Yes	<input type="text"/>	No	<input type="text"/>
Are you in a Civil Partnership?	Yes	<input type="text"/>	No	<input type="text"/>

Pregnancy or Maternity

Have you been pregnant and / or on maternity leave during the past 2 years?	Yes	<input type="text"/>	No	<input type="text"/>
---	-----	----------------------	----	----------------------

Sex

Male Female

Is your gender identity the same as the gender you were assigned at birth?

Yes No

Sexual orientation

Bisexual	<input type="checkbox"/>	Gay Man	<input type="checkbox"/>
Gay Woman / Lesbian	<input type="checkbox"/>	Heterosexual	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other – please specify	<input style="width: 100%;" type="text"/>		

Ethnic origin

Asian or Asian British

Afghan	<input type="checkbox"/>	Bangladeshi	<input type="checkbox"/>
Chinese	<input type="checkbox"/>	Indian	<input type="checkbox"/>
Pakistani	<input type="checkbox"/>	Sri Lankan	<input type="checkbox"/>
Any other Asian background – please specify	<input style="width: 100%;" type="text"/>		

Black or Black British

African	<input type="checkbox"/>	Caribbean	<input type="checkbox"/>
Somali	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input style="width: 100%;" type="text"/>	
Any other Black background – please specify	<input style="width: 100%;" type="text"/>		

Mixed background

White and Black African	<input type="checkbox"/>	White and Black Caribbean	<input type="checkbox"/>
White and Asian	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input style="width: 100%;" type="text"/>	
Any other mixed background – please specify	<input style="width: 100%;" type="text"/>		

Other ethnic background

Arab	<input type="checkbox"/>	Iranian	<input type="checkbox"/>
Any other ethnic group – please specify	<input style="width: 100%;" type="text"/>		

White or White British

Albanian	<input type="checkbox"/>	English	<input type="checkbox"/>
Gypsy / Irish Traveller	<input type="checkbox"/>	Irish	<input type="checkbox"/>
Polish	<input type="checkbox"/>	Romanian	<input type="checkbox"/>
Scottish	<input type="checkbox"/>	Welsh	<input type="checkbox"/>
Any other White background – please specify	<input style="width: 100%;" type="text"/>		

Religion and belief

Buddhism	<input type="checkbox"/>	Judaism	<input type="checkbox"/>
Christianity (all denominations)	<input type="checkbox"/>	Sikh	<input type="checkbox"/>
Hinduism	<input type="checkbox"/>	Zoroastrian	<input type="checkbox"/>
Islam	<input type="checkbox"/>	No religion / Atheist	<input type="checkbox"/>
Jainism	<input type="checkbox"/>	Other - please specify	<input type="text"/>

Thank you for completing the

Harrow Council

Hardship Scheme

Consultation Proposals 2016/17

Find them at www.harrow.gov.uk/ersconsultation

Or you can request a paper form from
Hardship Scheme consultation, Civic Centre 1, Station Road, Harrow HA1 2DU