

**Harrow Council Hardship Scheme  
(Previously Emergency Relief Scheme)  
Consultation Findings Report**

## Introduction

In 2015/16 Harrow's Emergency Relief Scheme provided essential items such as food, energy fuel, furniture and white goods to 260 households in exceptional hardship and experiencing an emergency need which they were unable to meet themselves. The scheme has a budget of £270,000. As part of a wider saving strategy, the budget for the Emergency Relief Scheme is being pooled with other Council budgets. It was proposed that £10,000 would remain to fund a reduced Hardship Scheme in place of Emergency Relief.

A consultation was undertaken to understand the implications of making this change in funding, and to give residents and stakeholders the opportunity to share views on what the new Hardship Scheme should look like. This report has been written to show how that feedback has helped to shape the draft Hardship Scheme.

## Hardship Scheme (Previously Emergency Relief Scheme) consultation

The consultation ran for five weeks 26<sup>th</sup> September 2016 to 31<sup>st</sup> October 2016. The consultation document with the draft policy that supported the consultation is shown in Appendix A.

The Voluntary and Community Sector was consulted as part of the wider consultation about Voluntary Sector Funding and Harrow's Information, Advice and Advocacy Strategy. There were four consultation events held with the Voluntary and Community Sector which were attended by representatives and service users from various organisations in the borough. Information about the organisations that were invited and attended is set out in Appendix B. This consultation was also available online.

We also wanted to hear the views of the public and other stakeholders on the proposed changes. To raise awareness of the consultation and give residents the opportunity to tell us what they thought, we carried out the following activity:

- Online survey
- Sent a consultation pack to 200 residents (including 100 people who had received an award from the Emergency Relief Scheme in the last year)
- Posters and consultation packs shared with Voluntary and Community Sector organisations to share with their service users
- Posters and consultation packs made available to people in Children Centres and Access Harrow
- Visited Harrow Job Centre, St George's Shopping Centre, Foodbank, Cedars Children Centre to speak to Harrow residents

- Held workshops with various Council departments to understand what the proposals might mean for them and their service users. These departments included Housing, Adults, Children’s and Public Health.

A total of 59 responses were received from the public and 30 from Organisations as follows:

- 59 completed surveys from members of the public
  - 49 at public events
  - 3 online
  - 7 postal returns
- Feedback from the following Voluntary Sector Organisations at events:
  - MIND in Harrow,
  - Citizens Advice Harrow
  - Carramea
  - Harrow Foodbank
  - Harrow Voluntary & Community Sector Forum – respondents consisted of:
    - Capable Communities
    - Citizens Advice Harrow
    - Friends of Bentley Priory Nature Reserve
    - Harrow Domestic & Sexual Violence
    - Harrow Women's Centre
    - Newcleus
    - South Harrow Christian Fellowship
    - Talk:Harrow
    - Voluntary Action Harrow Co-operative
  - Surveys completed by representatives from:
    - Hillingdon AIDS Response Trust
    - Ignite Trust
    - DAWN – Diwa Asian Women’s Network
    - Harrow Domestic and Sexual Violence Forum
    - Citizens Advice Harrow x 4
    - Harrow Mencap
    - Friends of Bentley Priory Nature Reserve
    - 9<sup>th</sup> Kenton Scout Group
    - Harrow LETS
- 1 written response was received from Harrow Law Centre which can be seen in Appendix C
- Feedback from 6 Council Departments:
  - Housing,
  - Adults,
  - Childrens,
  - Public Health,
  - Economic Development
  - Access Harrow

All of the feedback we received has been considered and views used to shape the new Hardship Scheme. Collated feedback from all responses and the written submissions from

Harrow Law Centre and Harrow Voluntary & Community Sector Forum can be seen in Appendix C

## Feedback on Harrow's proposed Hardship Scheme

Of the 59 public responses received 13 (22%) had heard of the Emergency Relief Scheme. 21 (70%) out of 30 of the organisations providing a response had heard of the scheme. 13 (22%) public responses believed that they or their dependents would be affected by the proposed changes (9 of these respondents had not previously heard of the scheme).

Detailed below is a summary of the responses given in the consultation with Harrow Council's proposed response. The proposals are set out with consideration to the outcomes from the Voluntary & Community Sector Funding and the Information, Advice and Advocacy Strategy consultations that took place simultaneously. Some of the proposals are dependent upon decisions which will be made by Cabinet prior to a decision on the Hardship Scheme.

This is how the feedback has shaped the proposed scheme:

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### ***We asked:***

Whether respondents agreed that the scheme should continue to provide emergency support for food, fuel, clothing and emergency travel

### ***Respondents said:***

#### **Public**

- 54 (91.5%) of the public said they agreed or strongly agreed that the scheme should provide emergency support for food, fuel, clothing and emergency travel.

#### **Organisations and their representatives**

- 24 (80%) of organisations that fed into the consultation also agreed or strongly agreed.
- The Law Centre stated that demand on the scheme is expected to grow due to changes such as welfare reform including roll out of Universal Credit and the 6 weeks taken to receive first payment.

#### **Summary**

Respondents said food, fuel, clothing and emergency travel should continue to be provided by the Hardship Scheme

### ***We propose:***

We are proposing to keep food, fuel, clothing and emergency travel as items applicants can receive assistance for within the draft Hardship scheme

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### ***We asked:***

Whether there were any other items that respondents thought should be included in the revised scheme.

## **Respondents said:**

### **Public**

- 17 (29%) of respondents said they did not think any other items should be included in the revised scheme
- 14 (24%) of respondents thought the scheme should not change/should still offer furniture, white goods and/or flooring.
- 11 (19%) of respondents did not respond to this question
- 8 (14%) of respondents suggested a range of other items for inclusion in the scheme. Each item was suggested once.
- 1 (2%) said gas and electric should not be included in the scheme

### **Organisations and their representatives**

- 8 (27%) said food and travel should continue to be provided. Travel was deemed to be important to support people in accessing advice or money/goods e.g. traveling between advice agency and Job Centre Plus to claim benefits.
- 7 (23%) organisations and their representatives said that furniture and/or white goods should continue to be included in the scheme. MIND in Harrow, suggested opportunities for these items to be accessed from other sources such as second hand provision.
- 6 (22%) either left this question blank or said no, there were no other items that should be included in the scheme.
- Harrow Foodbank stated the importance of people being able to access advice, particularly in respect to debt.
- Organisations also suggested some other items which were only suggested once each.
- Adult Services stated that these items should be provided on a priority needs basis if demand exceeded available funds i.e. food, then fuel, then clothing, then travel. They also recognised the importance of travel for people to resolve their situation e.g. apply for benefits.
- One organisation suggested that the money could be used for other things that would help people who might access the scheme e.g. paying volunteers travel expenses to take an applicant to a charity shop to get clothes for free.

### **Summary**

Most public respondents thought no additional items should be made available from the scheme. A lot of respondents, both public and organisations, thought that furniture and white goods should continue to be provided within the scheme

### **We propose:**

The Hardship Scheme will consist of a £10,000 fund which is in excess of current spend on the key items identified in the consultation: food, fuel, clothing and emergency travel.

Funding of up to £105,000 will be made available in 2017/18 for furniture and white goods to be awarded to people supported by the Council's Housing department. The Council will target preventative activity to reduce demand on the Hardship Scheme for 2018/19.,

- The number of awards made for furniture or white goods to people not known to the Council's Housing department is approximately 6 a year with expenditure of £1,500. Alternative provision will be considered for all households applying for furniture and white goods, however in exceptional circumstances awards will be made from the Hardship Scheme as long as funds allow.
- It is proposed that Council funds will be diverted toward preventative activity by delivering an Information and Advice service that will assist people in resolving issues at the earliest point rather than when they are in crisis.
- The Council's Housing Department will raise awareness with households on the Housing Waiting List and people known to the department to increase opportunities for people to source goods in advance of being offered a property and therefore reducing demand on the Hardship Scheme.
- If the Hardship Scheme is administered by the Voluntary & Community Sector, there will be a broader knowledge of available support in the borough to obtain furniture and white goods through second hand providers, getting help from family/friends and accessing other monies to provide these items including charitable funds. Voluntary advice agencies already have a broad knowledge of what is available in the sector so will be well placed to support this approach.
- The proposed Hardship Scheme is intended to provide assistance directly to residents and therefore does not include a commissioning process for other uses of the funds. The Voluntary & Community Sector Funding consultation gave opportunity for stakeholders to comment on how Council grants should be allocated for uses other than Information, Advice & Advocacy.

***We asked:***

Whether respondents agreed that the scheme should have a cap on the amount of financial support that can be given in a single award, for example of £100 maximum

***Respondents said:***

**Public**

- 36 (61%) of respondents agreed or strongly agreed while 20 (34)% disagreed or strongly disagreed.

**Organisations and their representatives**

- 11 (37%) of organisations or their representatives agreed or strongly agreed that this was appropriate if it helped the funds to go further and help more people. They also felt that there should be some discretion to do this. 6 (20%) disagreed or strongly disagreed that there should be a cap.

**Summary**

Respondents said a cap to the value of the awards should be applied.

***We propose:***

A cap will be applied to the value of awards, although where there is exceptional need then awards above this value may be issued. The cap will be £100 for awards of food, fuel, emergency travel and clothing and £500 for furniture and white goods

***We asked:***

Whether respondents agreed that the scheme should continue to limit the number of awards that can be paid to two a year

**Respondents said:**

**Public**

- 39 (66%) of respondents agreed or strongly agreed.
- 2 (3%) respondents thought there should be more than 2 awards in a year
- 2 (3%) respondents thought it should be limited to 1 a year

**Organisations and their representatives**

- 13 (43%) of organisations or their representatives also agreed but were concerned that this could have a negative impact on some people.

**Summary**

Respondents said that the scheme should continue to limit the awards to two a year

**We propose:**

The draft scheme proposes continuing to limit the number of awards that someone can be paid in year to two.

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***You also made other comments about the criteria in the scheme***

**Respondents said:**

**Public**

- Discretion should be kept in the scheme in case someone doesn't meet all of the criteria but they have an urgent need for example if they are disabled but not on means-tested benefits

**Organisations and their representatives**

- 6 organisations and their representatives gave additional information about each of the criteria which is summarised below:
  - Residency – 3 stated that a residency clause should be included. Carramea wanted this to be removed but said if it had to remain then it should include an exception for people impacted by family breakdown.
  - Age limit of 16 years – 2 gave a view that this should remain
  - Receipt of means-tested benefits – 3 said the scheme should not be restricted to people on means-tested benefits. Some Council Services stated that they were concerned that this criteria would deny access to the service to those working in low paid jobs or those who do not have access to public funds. Organisations also said it should be extended to include people with an underlying entitlement to means-tested benefits e.g. they are in the process of applying. Harrow Council Adult Services stated that if funds were limited then this criteria should be restricted to people on means-tested benefits, those households in receipt of Personal Independence Payments and those in receipt of Child Benefit.
  - Use of personal savings before getting an award the Hardship Scheme: 4 of the 6 gave a view on this point and said people should use their savings before being given an award from the scheme



- There should be no other sources of help such as family/friends or savings – 3 organisations or their representatives said the criteria should include the requirement that assistance cannot be found from family/friends and the applicant does not have savings to cover the cost. 1 had a concern over this approach as this can put a strain on relationships.
- Applicant must have access to public funds – 4 voluntary sector organisations or their representatives said they would like the scheme to be able to assist people who don't have access to public funds and ethically many voluntary organisations would find it difficult to refuse an award to a group of people. There was however some concern from different organisations that this would increase demand to an extent that the scheme couldn't afford to fund.
- Organisations also stated that the information required to evidence the criteria should be minimal so that the cost of administering the scheme was not excessive.
- 1 organisation said the length of time an award can be made for should be extended e.g. if the applicant is waiting for their benefits to be assessed.

### **Summary**

Respondents who gave additional information about the criteria mostly said the key criteria should remain unchanged. Two key exceptions to this were that people should not have to receive means-tested benefits and the scheme should be open to people who do not have access to public funds.

Respondents also said the administration of the scheme should not be too onerous and there should be an additional exception to the residency criteria for people experiencing family breakup.

### ***We propose:***

The criteria in the draft scheme have been amended to take account of feedback:

- Residency – 3 month residency clause to remain with the addition of people impacted by family breakup to be added as an exception to this rule
- Age limit of 16 years – criteria to remain
- Receipt of means-tested benefits – to be removed to allow people who are in work and experiencing financial hardship to access support. However the policy will be noted to state that if demand exceeds available funds then awards will be prioritised for those households in receipt of, or with an underlying entitlement to, means-tested benefits, Personal Independence Payments or Child Benefit. The inclusion of Personal Independence Payments and Child Benefit are also in response to feedback to other questions in the consultation, particularly that children and disabled people should be one of the priority groups if the funds are not able to support everyone.
- There should be no other sources of help such as family/friends or savings – criteria to remain.
- Applicant must have access to public funds - It is proposed that the scheme continues with the exclusion of people who do not have access to public funds. However, eligibility for food, energy fuel, clothing and emergency travel will be open to those who have had a Human Rights Assessment by adults' or children's social care – those with NRPF who meet certain criteria and are



permitted to access certain services, unless not providing support would breach their human rights.

It is proposed that the administration of the scheme be simplified by requiring the awarding agency to 'satisfy' itself of the applicants circumstances and removing the generic approach to require evidence of all criteria, particularly for food, fuel, emergency travel and clothing awards.

The scheme will be monitored to ensure that the proposed changes to the scheme do not create a level of demand that cannot be met within the funding pot. The consultation asked who should be prioritised within the scheme if demand was too high. The feedback to the consultation has been taken into account below to enable the scheme to be restricted in year should it need to be.

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***We asked:***

What respondents thought the impact would be on people who cannot access items that are currently available from the Emergency Relief Scheme such as fridges, washing machines, cookers and beds.

***You said:***

**Public**

- 17 (29%) of respondents thought it would be difficult/very hard/people will struggle
- 13 (22%) respondents indicated that they thought people would make do by accessing items elsewhere e.g. the Council, or would find work or that these items were not needed
- 12 (20%) of respondents thought people would experience a lower standard of living/increased poverty. This was because of things like having to get loans to pay for items or buying more expensive fast food as it wouldn't be possible to store it without a fridge.
- 12 (20%) of respondents thought people's health and mental wellbeing would be affected and there would be impacts of not being able to wash clothes such as children being bullied or adults unable to get jobs
- 7 (12%) of respondents thought there would be an increase in crime/begging
- 4 (7%) of respondents thought elderly people would be impacted by being socially isolated or because they could not access online services
- 2 (3%) of respondents thought there was a risk of homelessness as a result of the proposed changes
- 3 (3%) of respondents thought people would get loans but noted that this would result in problems with debt
- 1 (2%) of respondents said each of the following: people leaving hospital/supported accommodation would be affected; single parents would suffer more; people would use unsafe second hand items; vulnerable people would be worse affected; people will go to soup kitchens/foodbanks; people will be unable to make ends meet
- 5 (8%) respondents said they did not know or found it hard to say

## **Organisations and their representatives**

The key impacts stated by organisations and their representatives are:

- Health & Mental Wellbeing –11 (37%) respondents raised concerns about the impacts on people’s health and mental wellbeing. MIND stated that people with mental health issues would be detrimentally impacted as they often don’t have family or friends to support them. It was noted that this group of people would be affected if they had to buy more expensive food because they didn’t have a fridge which would have a negative impact on their mental health. Public Health also stated that people’s health could suffer if they ate less healthily because of lack of money.
- Homelessness – 5 respondents thought the proposals would impact homeless people’s ability to take a new property for example because they might not have furniture needed to move in. The Council’s Housing Department stated that beds were the critical items for people to source when moving into new properties as white goods could often be supplied by landlords.
- Pressure on other council budgets – 5 respondents raised concerns that removal of furniture and white goods from the scheme could create new pressure on other council budgets such as Children Services.
- Children and child poverty – Council Services including Public Health and Childrens were concerned about the wider impacts on children if they are unable to have clean clothes or an environment that allowed them to do their homework.
  - Children Services were concerned that it could result in a larger number of families being known to Children In Need (CIN). 7 households who received Emergency Relief in the first six months of 1016/17 were known to CIN
  - Harrow Law Centre stated that some families would not approach Children Services for help for fear of their child being taken into care
- Some respondents from the Harrow VCS Forum thought the change could result in increased homelessness, crime and suicide
- Harrow Law Centre stated that reduction of the budget to £10,000 will lead to considerable hardship locally and that additional pressure would be placed upon other council budgets
- Carramea stated that there would not be an impact on their service users of removing furniture or white goods from the scheme as they do not currently apply for them.

## **Summary**

Respondents said that the impact of removing furniture, white goods and flooring from the scheme would be very hard for some people and there would be more people living in poverty

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## ***We also asked:***

Whether there are any groups of people that respondents think will be particularly impacted by the proposed changes to the Emergency Relief Scheme.

## ***Respondents said:***

## Public

- 16 (27%) of respondents said elderly people/pensioners
- 10 (17%) of respondents said sick or disabled people
- 9 (15%) of respondents said they did not know or weren't sure
- 7 (12%) said single parents
- 6 (10%) said families and children
- 5 (8%) of respondents said people with low incomes/on benefits/in low-paid work
- 4 (7%) of respondents said everyone
- 4 (7%) said homeless people
- 3 (5%) said each of the following: People with mental health issues; Single people/people who struggle on their own; Unemployed people; No
- 2 (3%) of respondents said each of the following: People who had their benefits stopped; Yes
- 1 (2%) of respondents said the following: People fleeing domestic abuse; lone women; No families; People coming out of prison; people losing their jobs; people moving into work; people moving house; people on the housing list; really needy people; young people; Changes in the gap of services; No particular group

## Organisations and their representatives

Organisations and their representatives said:

- 7 (23%) Homeless people
- 5 (17%) Disabled people
- 5 (17%) Families/children
- 4 (13%) Victims of domestic abuse
- 2 (7%) Elderly
  
- 1 organisation thought there would be a beneficial impact to applicants by transferring administration of the scheme to the Voluntary & Community Sector

## Summary

Respondents said that the following groups of people would be most impacted by the proposed changes to the scheme:

- Elderly people
- Disabled people
- Families/children
- People on low incomes/on benefits/in deprivation/unemployed

### ***In response to both of the above questions we propose:***

While respondents raised concerns that elderly residents would be impacted, there have in reality been very few applications to the scheme from people aged 65+. In the first 6 months of 2016/17 there were no awards made for furniture or white goods to people aged 65 or over, and only one for food/fuel. It is therefore anticipated that this group will experience minimum impact by the removal of these items from the Hardship Scheme. To reduce the detrimental impact and maximise the benefits to residents it is proposed:

- Food, fuel, clothing and emergency travel will be retained in the Hardship Scheme
- Funding of £105,000 will be made available in 2017/18 for furniture and white goods to be awarded to people supported by the Council's Housing department. The Council will target preventative activity to reduce demand on the Hardship Scheme.
- The number of awards made for furniture or white goods to people not known to the Council's Housing department is approximately 6 a year with expenditure of £1,500. Alternative provision will be considered for all households applying for furniture and white goods, however in exceptional circumstances awards will be made from the Hardship Scheme as long as funds allow.
- Council funds will be diverted toward more preventative activity through the Information, Advice & Advocacy Strategy to reduce the demand on the scheme as people are given advice to resolve their situation before they reach crisis point.
- The Hardship Scheme has a fund of £10,000 which is in excess of the value of spend on items that will be retained in the scheme following feedback from the consultation: food, fuel, clothing and emergency travel. This will enable more households to receive assistance if required and gives discretion to the service provider for any one off awards for other items in exceptional circumstances.
- The Council's Housing Department will raise awareness amongst people waiting to be rehoused that they will need to provide their own furniture/white goods. This will give them time to source items e.g. from friends/family, second hand, through a DWP Budgeting Loan, and therefore reduce demand on the reduced funding pot.
- Harrow Council's Housing Department will work with landlords to maximise availability of white goods in properties, noting concern raised in the consultation that this could result in higher rents
- The Hardship Scheme administration for food, fuel, clothing and emergency travel will transfer to the Information & Advice provider to give applicants access to more support. The provider is expected to have greater knowledge and connections with charitable organisations that may be able to assist people in greatest need.
- The Information & Advice provider will be best placed to understand the needs of their service users and to offer holistic support to people in need. This will deliver more sustainable outcomes and potentially reducing the need for some of these households in the future
- The scheme will be monitored to capture the impacts of the proposed changes and allow for a review of the scheme should it be required.

**We asked:**

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

**You said:**

**Public**

- 13 (22%) said they would ask friends/family

- 14 (24%) said they would use charities/Foodbank/second hand items
- 5 (8%) said they would use loans/loan sharks (although most noted that there would be a detrimental impact of getting a loan)
- 5 (8%) said it would be very difficult for people
- 4 (7%) said it would impact on people's health or mental health
- 3 (5%) said each of the following: people would use benefits or the social fund; No; Don't know
- 2 (3%) said each of the following: people would ask the Council for help; find work; use the laundrette or eat out/take aways
- 13 other respondents gave different responses such as hand washing; struggle to save money; share with others

### **Organisations and their representatives**

As well as the above responses, organisations said the following should be considered:

- Innovative solutions such as using some of the Hardship Scheme funds to transport residents to where they can access free goods;
- Opportunities to supply second hand furniture in place of new from the scheme such as creating a channel for people to supply items through the crowdfunding route proposed in the Voluntary Sector Funding Review;
- Alternative funding opportunities to enable provision of furniture and white goods, such as a Lottery bids.

### **Summary**

Respondents said people would ask family or friends for help, or turn to charities for support.

### ***We propose:***

The revised Voluntary & Community Sector Funding proposals set out new funding streams for the Voluntary & Community Sector which could be considered as opportunities to raise funds or create alternative ways to support provision of furniture/white goods by charities.

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### ***We asked:***

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

### ***Respondents said:***

#### **Public**

- 20 (34%) of respondents said Senior Citizens/elderly
- 16 (27%) of respondents said disabled or sick people including those with mental health issues
- 9 (15%) of respondents said families and children
- 9 (15%) of respondents said people who were needy/vulnerable
- 5 (8.5%) of respondents said single parents
- 4 (7%) of respondents said homeless people

### **Organisations and their representatives**

- 10 (33%) of respondents said disabled people including those with mental health issues
- 5 (17%) of respondents said children
- 3 (10%) of respondents said homeless people
- 3 (10%) of respondents said people on low incomes
- There were further groups that either one or two respondents listed

### **Summary**

Respondents said the top three groups that should be prioritised were elderly, disabled including those with mental health issues and families with children.

### ***We propose:***

After considering the feedback to the consultation it is proposed that £105,000 be allocated to provide furniture and white goods to households applying to the Hardship Scheme. This funding will initially be for 2017/18 only so the Council will keep the scheme under review to decide whether funding should be made available from 2018/19.

The £10,000 funding to be made available for food, fuel, emergency travel and clothing is greater than the amount spent on these items in 2015/16. While there is potential for demand to increase for example as a result of welfare reforms, it is anticipated that anyone meeting the revised criteria will be able to access the Hardship Scheme. However it is proposed that the scheme states that if demand exceeds the level of funds available, then priority should be given to the following groups who will continue to need to meet the scheme criteria:

- People aged 65+ years
- Disabled people including those with mental health issues (defined as someone in receipt of a disability benefit)
- Families with children

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### ***We asked:***

6 organisations gave additional information on whether administration of the scheme should be transferred to the Voluntary and Community Sector as part of the Information, Advice and Advocacy Strategy

### ***Respondents said:***

#### **Organisations and their representatives**

5 organisations said yes, administration of the Hardship Scheme should move to the Voluntary and Community Sector because:

- It will enable more holistic support to be offered and increase the likelihood of a sustainable solution for the household;
- The Voluntary & Community Sector has a better understanding of the needs of the applicant and whether they meet the criteria of the scheme;



- As the voluntary sector gains a more in-depth view of the applicant, they are better able to assess their needs and therefore provide a meaningful package of support to assist them;
- The sector has greater awareness of other support available to residents to meet their needs
- Some agencies in this sector offer out of hours services

The Voluntary Sector said that administration and monitoring of the scheme should not be too onerous or costly.

Harrow Council Services agreed that the administration of the scheme should not be too onerous, but said that it was important to have a level of monitoring that minimised risk to the funds by providing an audit trail, while also helping to understand who is accessing the scheme.

Two respondents said that funds should be spread across the year to ensure they did not run out before the end of the year.

Harrow Law Centre said administration of the scheme should not be transferred to the Voluntary Sector because:

- There are concerns about what assistance would be available to an applicant who was refused an award if the organisation that is delivering the scheme is the same organisation that would have otherwise provided assistance to challenge the decision
- There is no one voluntary organisation in Harrow who would be able to reach out to all our diverse communities
- Opening hours of the organisation delivering the service need to be able to support immediate need
- People may not know where they can go to access the scheme if it is delivered by an organisation that would normally support a particular group within the borough which some people may not otherwise think to contact. A small charity will lack the level of recognition held by the council.
- Harrow Law Centre also noted that by devolving this duty to the Voluntary Sector, this could leave the Local Authority open to challenge against decisions made by a third party on its behalf.

### **Summary**

The majority of respondents said administration of the scheme should be transferred to the Voluntary and Community Sector

### ***We propose:***

- To transfer the administration of the Hardship Scheme for food, fuel, emergency travel and clothing to the Information & Advice provider.
- Administrative requirements have been reduced to minimise cost, while also ensuring funds are targeted to those most in need as identified by this consultation.
- Commit to reviewing the monitoring requirements for the scheme when service is commissioned.



- The scheme will require funds to be allocated on a monthly basis to ensure assistance is available throughout the year
- In response to the concerns raised by Harrow Law Centre:
  - The specification for the procurement of a third party service provider for the Hardship scheme will set out the need for an alternative route of assistance for people challenging an initial refusal of an award
  - Organisations across the borough representing diverse communities will be able to refer into the scheme, hence reducing the risk to groups not being approached directly by the service provider.
  - The specification will set out the need for applications to be assessed within a target of one working day, up to a maximum of two.
  - The Council sets out monitoring arrangements within third party contracts to ensure delivery standards are understood and maintained by the service provider. By adhering to this standard the risk of successful challenge is minimal.

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***Respondents also told us:***

Public Health would welcome the opportunity to provide information to the new service provider to assist them in giving appropriate advice to people applying to the Hardship Scheme in respect to what is available to them e.g. healthy start vouchers for children under 4

***Our response:***

- The proposed Information, Advice & Advocacy Strategy seeks to raise awareness of available advice and support across the borough. Public Health will be able to use this process to share known services

In reference to the abolition of the Social Fund Harrow Law Centre stated “In devolving its responsibility to local authorities without a ring fenced budget and with no accountability for how the money is spent central government simply washed its hands of all responsibility for the ultimate safety net to the poor. We urge Harrow Council not to do the same and to reconsider this cut.

***Our response:***

- We propose that the specification will make arrangements for the service provider to ring fence the £10k funding for the scheme awards, therefore ensuring this money can only be used for awards to claimants.

One respondent stated: “We believe that funding made available to this scheme is a choice made by the council and not defined by statute. A higher funded scheme should support all those that are in need. The money to fund a higher level service could be found from making different choices, such as reducing payments to consultants, pooling funds and efficiencies with other statutory agencies (DWP Flexible support funds) and investing in London Councils schemes for match funding European Funding to bring in more funding. We would also like to know what the administration fees are for this service, with a view to cutting back on these”

***Our response:***

Harrow Council is taking every opportunity to make the point to Government about the borough's funding position and is trying every way it can think of to protect local public services. 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. However with growing pressures and demand the council still faces a funding gap of £83m so every part of the Council is having to do their bit to help close this gap.

The administration costs for the Hardship Scheme have been pooled with the General Advice provision. More information is available in the Voluntary & Community Sector Funding Proposal Consultation feedback report and corresponding Cabinet report. Funds have been pooled to enable efficiencies to be made while also taking into consideration feedback from this Emergency Relief Scheme consultation which suggests the scheme needs to be less onerous in its administration.

## Next Steps

The outcomes of the consultation have been used to shape the proposed Hardship Scheme which can be viewed in Appendix D. The draft scheme will be taken to Cabinet in January 2017 for members to decide on whether to adopt the proposed scheme. If the draft Hardship Scheme is adopted, it will begin in April 2017 with transfer of administration to the Voluntary & Community Sector for food, fuel, clothing and emergency travel later in the year as part of the commissioning of services from the sector.

## Appendices

**Appendix A** – Consultation document and draft Hardship Scheme policy to support consultation

**Appendix B** – Organisations that attended Voluntary & Community Sector consultation events where people were given an opportunity to share their views on the proposed changes to the Emergency Relief Scheme

<u>Name</u>	<u>Organisation</u>
Alex Buckmire	Voluntary Action Harrow Group (VAHC)
Nigel Long	HAD
Tajinder Nijjar	CAB
Steve Porter	Capable Communities Ltd
Yvonne Lee	Harrow Mencap
John Clifton	Harrow Epilepsy Action
Shakana Sundarram	Age UK Harrow
Vicki Phillips	CAB
Ewan Malulu	Relate London North West
Victoria Silvere	Harrow Mencap
Tony O'Hara	Carramea
Rachel Avery	VAHC
Katherine Harrison	Wealdstone Methodist Church
Carol Foyle	Harrow VCS + Kids Can Achieve
Thanuja Pereira	Harrow VCS + SHCF

Rachel Wright	VAHC
Pushpa Hargovan Walloo	Harrow Shopmobility
Raksha Panya	Mind in Harrow
Samim Rateb	HUG Representative (user of service) Mind in Harrow
Linda Robinson	Friends of Bentley - Priory Nature Reserve
Dan Burke	Young Harrow Foundation
Robin Webb	St Luke's Hospice
Amede Ziegler	St Luke's Hospice
John Allwright	Harrow Shopmobility
Rowena Saber	WISH Centre
Devan Pillai	Harrow Mencap
Mark Gillam	Mind in Harrow
Daniel Haigh	Ignite Trust
Avari Modesin	Age UK Harrow
AO Hara	Carramea
Alison Davies	Harrow Mencap
Rani Kalh	DAWN

**Appendix C – Harrow Law Centre response**

**Appendix D - Draft Hardship Scheme Policy**