

# Household Support Fund Policy

## Introduction

On 30 September 2021, the Department for Work and Pensions (“DWP”) announced £500m of new funding for authorities across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland to distribute to vulnerable households over winter. This is known as the Household Support Fund (“the Grant”).

The paper presented to Cabinet in November 2021 provide the background, options and information on the proposed framework. This policy extracts and expands on the key criteria for the framework.

Harrow’s Household Support Fund grant allocation is £1,476,707.18.

## Eligibility Criteria

The Grant is limited to awards and applications covering the funding period from 6 October 2021 to 31 March 2022. Funds must have been spent or committed before 31 March 2022 and cannot be used for future commitments.

Applications must be made by a household currently living within the Borough of Harrow.

Table 1 sets out additional eligibility criteria.

## Table 1: Housing Support Fund Principles and Conditions

| Condition / Principle           | Guidance  | Criteria   |
|---------------------------------|---|--|
| <b>Households with Children</b> | At least 50% of the total funding must be spent on families with children. These households do not have be in receipt of DWP welfare benefits | This means a household with: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) a person who will be under the age of 19 as at 31st March 2022, <u>or</u></li> <li>2) a person aged 19 or over in respect of whom a child-related benefit is paid or free school meals are provided during the period 06 October 2021 and 31 March 2022.</li> </ol>   |
| <b>Essential Living Costs</b>   | The HSF should primarily be used to support households in most need with eligible spend for essential living costs                            | These costs should include: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3) <b>Food.</b></li> <li>4) <b>Energy</b> for domestic heating, cooking or lighting, including oil or portable gas cylinders.</li> <li>5) <b>Water bills</b> for drinking, washing, cooking, and sanitary purposes and sewerage.</li> <li>6) <b>Essentials</b> linked to the above, in recognition that costs may arise which directly affect a household's ability to afford or access food, energy and water. e.g:               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Sanitary products</li> <li>ii. Warm clothing</li> <li>iii. Soap,</li> <li>iv. Blankets</li> <li>v. Boiler service/repair,</li> <li>vi. Purchase of equipment including fridges, freezers, ovens, etc.</li> </ol> </li> </ol> |
| <b>Associated Living Costs</b>  | The HSF can also be used to support households with certain other essential costs   | 7) <b>Wider essential costs</b> not linked to energy and water. These may include, but are not limited to: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Support with other bills including broadband or phone bills,</li> <li>ii. Other clothing</li> <li>iii. Other furniture such as mattress</li> <li>iv. Essential transport-related costs such as repairing a car, buying a bicycle or paying for fuel.</li> <li>v. Council Tax arrears</li> </ol>   |

|       |   |  |
|-------|---|--|
| Other | The HSF can be used for other means of support not covered by the above | <p><b>8) Housing costs</b>, in exceptional cases of genuine emergency where existing welfare and support i.e. the housing cost element of Universal Credit (UC), Housing Benefit (HB) or Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) do not meet this exceptional need, the HSF can be used to support housing costs but not <b>mortgage payments</b>.</p> <p><b>9) Support to individuals with No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF)</b>, funding can be provided, regardless of immigration status, if there is a genuine care need that does not arise solely from destitution, for example if:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. there are community care needs</li> <li>ii. they have serious health problems</li> <li>iii. there is a risk to a child's wellbeing</li> </ul> |
|-------|---|--|

## Funding for households with children

Table 2 provides the proposed funding levels for households with children

**Table 2: Proposed Funding for Households with Children**

| Category   | Estimated No of Children          |  | Provisional Allocation of Funding (£)        |
|--|-----------------------------------|--|--|
| <b>Families with Children in receipt of Free School Meals (FSM):</b>   |                                   |  |  |
| October 2021 Half-Term (5 days)  | 6088                              | £3 per day per child                                   | £91,320                                      |
| Christmas 2021(11 days)  | 6088                              | £3 per day per child plus additional £10 for Christmas | £261,784                                     |
| February 2022 Half-Term (5 days)   | 6088                              | £3 per day per child                                   | £91,320                                      |
| End of March 2022 (11 days)  | 6088                              | £3 per day per child                                   | £200,904                                     |
|  | <b>Estimated No of Households</b> | <b>Proposed Funding per Household</b>                  | <b>Provisional Allocation of Funding (£)</b> |
| <b>Working age families with Children in receipt of Council Tax Support – one off payment</b>  | 5030                              | £40 + postage  | £204,469.50                                  |
| <b>Households with Children in Emergency Accommodation and in receipt of Housing Benefit – five monthly payments from Nov 2021 to Mar 2022</b> | 83                                | £180 + postage   | £15,209.75                                   |
| <b>Total</b>   |                                   |  | <b>£ 865,007.25</b>                          |

It is forecast that the above approach will exceed the 50% funding reserved for households with children. In addition, households in the borough both with and without children can apply for support funded by £352,100 either from the Community Hub or the Emergency Support Scheme.

## Funding for households without children

| Category  | Estimated No of Households | Proposed Funding per Household | Provisional Allocation of Funding (£) |
|---|----------------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Working Age households without children in receipt of Council Tax Support – one off payment | 3631                       | £40 + postage                  | £147,600.15                           |

Awards to households with or without children either in lieu of free school meals during school holidays, to Council Tax Support households and to households with children in emergency accommodation in receipt of Housing Benefits will be made in the form of a voucher. Vouchers can be redeemed at supermarkets, assisting the household with the cost of food. It is anticipated that this approach will either help ease the financial pressure of purchasing food directly, or free up funds within the household that would otherwise have been spent on food to use on other essential items such as gas, electric or water costs.

## Funding for households with and without children

### Community Hub

£60k of funding will be allocated to the Community Hub to support provision of food parcels to Harrow residents. Households can self-refer by registering with the service to access support. Residents who have received assistance through other elements of the scheme are not restricted from receiving support from the Community Hub. The number of awards are not limited so the service can provide assistance over a longer period of time where required, and therefore not only assisting with urgent needs for food but also freeing up household funds to cover essentials other than food.

### Emergency Support Scheme

Funding of £271,700 will be allocated to an Emergency Support Scheme which residents can apply to. Potential applicants will be triaged by Citizens Advice Harrow, and where appropriate an application form submitted with support from Citizens Advice for assessment by the Council.

The scheme will potentially assist with any essential item set out in Table 1. Provision will be in kind, voucher, payment card with or without ATM use, BACS payment or direct payment to third party e.g. landlord for rent arrears or energy fuel provider.

Awards will normally be limited to £100 per household for smaller items such as food, energy fuel and clothing, and £500 for furniture and white goods.

Eligibility will be assessed by the household's ability to fund the essential item based on their available income and capital. Consideration will be given to whether the award will make a material difference to the household, e.g. if gas arrears are cleared can the household afford to sustain payments in future.

£171,700 of the Emergency Support Scheme funding is allocated to rent arrears. Support with rent arrears is only eligible where no other provision is available including Housing Benefit, Universal Credit or Discretionary Housing Payments. Rent arrears may be through application from the household via Citizens Advice, or through proactive action by the Council's Housing Department.

Once funds have been exhausted no further awards will be made.

The funding allocations will be reviewed on a monthly basis and adjusted to prioritise awards for free school meals, to households with children in emergency accommodation on Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support households.

### Reserve

£32,399.78 will be held in reserve to top up any of the funding pots should demand be higher than forecast. Any potential underspend will be allocated to free school meals for the Easter payment in advance of the 31 March 2022 grant deadline.

### **Non-eligible spend**

Eligible spend does not include the following:

- Advice services such as debt advice
- Mortgage costs.

### **Backdating**

Applications will be accepted for funding that has already been occurred, subject to the application being made with 28 days of the commitment (56 days where the funding relates to a commitment from 6 to 31 October 2021). The funding period must fall within the period 6 October 2021 to 31 March 2022. All applications must be received by 18 March 2022 to ensure awards are made prior to 31 March 2022.

### **Multiple Claims**

Households may receive awards from multiple elements of the Household Support Fund. Repeat applications to the Emergency Support Scheme will consider how any previous awards have been used by the household.

### **Third-party applications**

Applicants can apply on behalf of someone else, however the funding must be provided to a bank account in the name of the person for whom the application is being made. In exceptional circumstances awards will be made to third parties if the award is made toward arrears of rent, energy fuel or water. Funding can be provided to third party organisations to distribute on the basis the organisation administers the Grant in accordance with this policy and contracts to provide monitoring information to the Council.

Third party organisations are limited to the following:

- Registered charities and voluntary organisations
- Schools
- Food banks
- General Practitioners
- Care organisations

### **Application Process**

Applications for Emergency Support will be made through CAB.

### **Determination of applications**

Applications to the Emergency Support Scheme will be administered by the Benefits Service upon receipt from Citizens Advice Harrow.. The Housing Department will administer applications for assistance with rent arrears. Awards will be approved and made by a Senior Assessor at G7 grade or above who has not been involved in the decision making process.

### **Appeals**

The applicant may request a review of a decision by writing to Harrow Council setting out the reason they think the decision is incorrect. The decision will be reviewed by an officer more senior than the original decision maker. The decision will be communicated to the application within one month or as soon as is reasonably practicable. This decision is final.

### **Complaints**

Any complaints made in reference to the Household Support Fund will be considered under the Council's Corporate Complaints Policy.

### **Policy review**

The policy will be subject to periodic review by the Corporate Director of Resources or his authorised officer.

### **Combatting fraud**

In order to ensure that applications for funding are not subject to abuse, all submitted applications will require a statutory declaration of truth, a statement regarding data processing and a recovery of funds statement. This declaration allows for the Council, through its corporate anti-fraud team, to carry out post payment checks in order to give greater assurance that the funds were claimed correctly. The declaration will carry a warning that allows the Council to consider taking criminal action against persons who have been found to have deliberately made false applications for the funding. It also allows for the recovery of funds which have been paid based on false or inaccurate information.

All awards will be made within existing compliance procedures and policies that apply to the Council's financial systems.

### **Verification**

Verification of the household's circumstances will be required to verify the application. This will include proof of identity and national insurance number for any awards made using a Payment Card. A bank statement showing name, address, account number and sort code will be required for awards via BACS.

### **The award**

It is intended that all applications will be processed within five working days of receipt of all required evidence. Payments will be made in-kind, by voucher, by payment card with or without ATM use, via BACS or as a direct payment to landlord or energy fuel/water provider. Successful applicants should expect to receive the funds within seven working days of the fully completed application. Where a payment card is awarded the applicant will be required to sign a Cardholder Agreement to confirm they understand the undertaking of using the card.

As funding is limited, any award will be on a first come first served basis. The Council cannot commit to further funding applications once all available funding has been allocated.