

Notice of KEY Executive Decision

Subject Heading:	Household Support Fund 2022
Decision Maker:	Ray Morgon, Leader of the Council
Cabinet Member:	Chris Wilkins
SLT Lead:	Dave McNamara
Report Author and contact details:	Chris Henry Chris.henry@havering.gov.uk
Policy context:	To give vulnerable households support from April 2022 to September 2022 particularly those including children and pensioners who would otherwise struggle with food, essential utility bills or other essential living costs.
Financial summary:	A ring-fenced government grant of £1,648,150.98 has been made available for the period 1 April 2022 to 30 September 2022 to support local expenditure including administrative costs of the Housing Support Fund 2022.
Reason decision is Key	Expenditure or saving (including anticipated income) of £500,000 or more
Date notice given of intended decision:	13 May 2022

Key Executive Decision

Relevant OSC:	Overview and Scrutiny Board
Is it an urgent decision?	No
Is this decision exempt from being called-in?	No

The subject matter of this report deals with the following Council Objectives

Communities making Havering	<input type="checkbox"/>
Places making Havering	<input type="checkbox"/>
Opportunities making Havering	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Connections making Havering	<input type="checkbox"/>

Part A – Report seeking decision

DETAIL OF THE DECISION REQUESTED AND RECOMMENDED ACTION

On 23 March 2022, the government announced that the Household Support Fund (HSF) would be extended from 1 April 2022 to 30 September 2022. The funding is intended to support households with food, energy and water bills.

Havering has been given an indicative funding allocation of £1,648,150.98 to be distributed from 1 April 2022 to 30 September 2022.

The recommendations below have been made with due regard to Government guidance and Section 17 of the Children Act 1989 to support vulnerable and low income individuals and families.

Recommendations

1. That £762,710 is made available to help support vulnerable and low income households under the Emergency Assistance Scheme.
2. That £535,500 HSF grant is allocated to 5,355 pension age Council Tax payers in receipt of Council Tax Support by way of a £100 credit to their Council Tax accounts.
3. That £150,000 from the HSF Grant is made available to provide 300 Care leavers with £500.00 each to help with their fuel and food bills.
4. That £40,000 is allocated from the HSF grant to support the provision of Children's accommodation.
5. That £30,000 is made available to support the vulnerable families and children coming from the Ukraine under the Visa Scheme.
6. That £129,940 is assigned to Children's Services, Exchequer & Transactional Services, Policy, Performance & Community and DABD as outlined below for the set-up, administrative and software costs related to the HSF grant activities.

AUTHORITY UNDER WHICH DECISION IS MADE

Part 3 of the Constitution - Responsibility for Functions: Para. 2.2 (a) (i) relating to taking decisions relating to the Councils finances including but not exclusively budget control.

STATEMENT OF THE REASONS FOR THE DECISION

Introduction

On 23 March 2022, the government announced that the Household Support Fund (HSF) would be extended from 1 April 2022 to 30 September 2022 to help those most in need. Appendix A Draft Launch Letter – Household Support Fund April-Sept 2022 contains details of the launch of the HSF extension.

Unlike previous Covid 19 and HSF funding for low income households, government has now added that at least one third of the total funding must be used to support households that include a person who has reached state pension age. This is in addition to one third (previously 80%) also being spent on support for families with children. Details of the guidance can be found at Appendix B Draft Guidance - Household Support Fund April-Sept 2022.

Government has allocated the same amount of £1,648,150 HSF grant to Havering to spend on the most vulnerable households to help with essentials such energy, food and water bills between 1 April 2022 and 30 September 2022. Appendix C Draft Final Grant Determination - Household Support Fund April-Sept 2022 provides the detail of the funding allocation.

The HSF Grant Conditions

Government expect councils to use the grant to support households who would otherwise struggle with energy bills, food, water bills and other essential costs. This covers a wide range of low income households in need including families with children of all ages, pensioners, and particularly those who cannot increase their income through work such as people with disabilities and unpaid carers.

When administering this scheme, councils are encouraged to adopt the following principles:

- Use discretion on how to identify and support those most in need.
- Use the funding to meet immediate needs and help those who are struggling to afford energy, food and water bills, and other related essentials. Funding can also be used to support households who are struggling to afford wider essentials.
- In exceptional cases of genuine emergency, the funding can additionally be used to support housing costs where existing housing support schemes do not meet this exceptional need.
- Work together where necessary and appropriate with other local services, such as social and care workers to help identify and support households within the scope of the scheme.

There is nothing in the guidance that prevents local authorities making grant payments directly on to council tax accounts where the vulnerable household has a council tax liability and where it will directly help that household with immediate cost pressures.

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Council Tax accounts can be used as a means of distributing the grant particularly people of pension age.

The HSF grant can cover the reasonable administrative costs of delivering the objectives of the HSF.

The HSF fund is ring-fenced and cannot be used to support mortgage costs or provide advice services including debt advice.

The Authority must maintain reliable, accessible and up to date accounting records with an adequate audit trail for all expenditure funded by grant monies under this Determination.

Councils must also manage the risk of fraud and consider household income and rent liability to ensure support is going to those in genuine need.

Authorities will be expected to report expenditure to the DWP in two management information returns on 22 July 2022 ND 21 October 2022.

The council must prepare a Statement of Grant Usage to be submitted to the Department at a time and in a form directed by the Secretary of State.

The grant will be paid quarterly in arrears following receipt by the Department of the Statement of Grant Usage. Any underspends cannot be carried forward and any overspends cannot be claimed from government. Therefore funds should be spent by 30 September 2022.

Councils must reference that the grant is funded by the DWP or government in any publicity material, including online channels and media releases.

Proposals to spend the HSF Grant

Havering has developed a local delivery framework and approach which is flexible and ensures the objectives and principles of the Housing Support Fund are met.

Havering Emergency Assistance Scheme £762,710

Havering's Emergency Assistance Scheme provides emergency support to low income households through cash (BACS) payments for food, essential items, repairs and utility bills. Furniture and white goods are also available under the scheme. The scheme is available to low-income working age and pension age individuals and families who require emergency financial assistance.

The Disablement Association Barking and Dagenham and Benefit Services partner together to provide the scheme. It is proposed that £762,710 of the HSF grant is allocated to the Emergency Assistance Scheme.

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Pension Age Council Tax Payers receiving Council Tax Support £535,500

It is proposed that Council Tax payers of pension age on Council Tax Support receive £100 direct to their bank account or credited to their Council Tax account. This will ensure that 5,355 low income residents of pension age receive support towards their energy, food or essential bills.

Where a Council Tax Support tax payer of pension age does not indicate their choice of bank account or Council Tax account, the £100 will be credited to their Council Tax account. This will cost £535,500 which is approximately a third of the fund and so meets government guidance.

Havering Care Leavers £150,000

Providing Care leavers with support from the previous HSF grant was successful in 2021/22. The council as the corporate parent was able to engage better with Care leavers and improve their circumstances and opportunities.

£150,000 from the HSF fund will provide 300 Care leavers with £500 to help with fuel, food and essential bills.

Supporting Families Move from temporary Accommodation £40,000

Families moving from temporary accommodation incur extra costs settling into a new home. £40,000 will be allocated support those vulnerable families with children helping pay for food and fuel bills.

Supporting Vulnerable People from the Ukraine £30,000

Individuals and families coming to Havering under the Homes for Ukraine Visa Scheme who require immediate assistance which can be provided through HSF. It is proposed that £30,000 of the HSF grant is allocated to this endeavour.

Cost of Administration £129,940

There will be administration costs associated with the proposal above which are outlined in the table below along with the scheme costs. The administrative costs make up approximately eight per cent of the overall fund.

Service	Est Admin Cost	Est Scheme Cost
DABD	£50,000	£762,710
Council Tax & Benefits	£44,940	£535,500
Care leavers	£10,000	£150,000
Transactional Services	£10,000	£40,000
Software for Pensioners	£10,000	Pensioners
Ukraine Family Support	£5,000	£30,000
Sub Total	£129,940	£1,518,210
Grand Total		£1,648,150

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Children's and Exchequer and Transactional Services will continue to work with the council's Communications team to discuss media and develop targeted messages for Facebook and Living E-newsletter, to encourage take up.

OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED

None

PRE-DECISION CONSULTATION

There is no statutory requirement for a public consultation. SLT members, Children's Services, Policy and Regeneration and Exchequer and Transactional Services have been consulted regarding this decision.

NAME AND JOB TITLE OF STAFF MEMBER ADVISING THE DECISION-MAKER

Name: Chris Henry

Designation: Head of Council Tax & Benefits

Signature:

Date: 11 July 2022



Part B - Assessment of implications and risks

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS AND RISKS

The Housing Support fund is made available to councils under s31 of the Local Government Act 2003.

The Emergency Assistance Scheme is a discretionary scheme set up under Section 1 of the Localism Act 2011 whose criteria fully meet the conditions set out for HSF expenditure.

The recommendations within this report adhere to the guidance for the Household Support Fund for families and people of pension age as well as promote the welfare of children in accordance with Section 17 of the Children Act 1989.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS AND RISKS

DWP funding of £1,648,150.98 has been provided to cover the period from 1 April 2022 to 30 September 2022.

The amount allocated to the Emergency Assistance Scheme of £762,710 should be sufficient to cover the period to 30 September 2022 and government has confirmed further funding will become available from October 2022 (which will be the subject of a separate report).

Payment of the grant from DWP to Havering will be made in arrears after the interim Management Information (MI) return in July 2022 and the final MI return at the end of grant period in October 2022 after the DWP has verified the MI. If it is felt that the payment arrangements will create significant cash flow problems, the DWP can be notified with supporting evidence.

HUMAN RESOURCES IMPLICATIONS AND RISKS (AND ACCOMMODATION IMPLICATIONS WHERE RELEVANT)

The recommendations in this report do not give rise to any identifiable HR risks or implications that would directly affect the Council's workforce.

There will be additional verification and processing work arising from the Household Support Fund for Children's Services, Exchequer and Transactional Services and other departments. Administrative funding will enable these Services to manage and organise their workloads efficiently.

EQUALITIES AND SOCIAL INCLUSION IMPLICATIONS AND RISKS

The Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 requires the Council, when exercising its functions, to have due regard to:

- (i) The need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Equality Act 2010;
- (ii) The need to advance equality of opportunity between persons who share protected characteristics and those who do not, and;
- (iii) Foster good relations between those who have protected characteristics and those who do not.

Note: 'Protected characteristics' are age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnerships, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex/gender and sexual orientation.

While an Equalities Assessment is not required for this scheme, the Council is committed to the Equalities Duty in the provision and commissioning of its services.

In addition, the Council is also committed to improving the quality of life and wellbeing for all Havering residents in respect of socio-economics and health determinants. The recommendations for approval in this report will be essential to support the financial health of families with children and pensioners.

HEALTH AND WELLBEING IMPLICATIONS AND RISKS

Havering council is committed to improving the health and wellbeing of all residents including those most vulnerable. Research has shown there is a clear correlation between poverty and health. The purpose of this decision is to provide financial support to low income families with children and vulnerable residents to ensure they are adequately fed and warm during the winter months of the Coronavirus pandemic.

The financial support provided to vulnerable households in the borough will have a positive impact on residents' health and wellbeing.

There are no identifiable risks or negative implications to this report.

ENVIRONMENTAL AND CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS AND RISKS

There are no environmental and climate change implications or risks to this report.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Key Executive Decision

None

APPENDICIES

Appendix A Draft Launch Letter – Household Support Fund April-Sept 2022

Appendix B Draft Guidance - Household Support Fund April-Sept 2022

Appendix C Draft Final Grant Determination - Household Support Fund April-Sept 2022

Key Executive Decision

Part C – Record of decision

I have made this executive decision in accordance with authority delegated to me by the Leader of the Council and in compliance with the requirements of the Constitution.

Decision

Proposal agreed

Delete as applicable

Proposal NOT agreed because

Details of decision maker

Signed

Name:

Cabinet Portfolio held:

CMT Member title:

Head of Service title

Other manager title:

Date:

Lodging this notice

The signed decision notice must be delivered to Democratic Services, in the Town Hall.

For use by Committee Administration

This notice was lodged with me on _____

Signed _____