

Notice of KEY Executive Decision

Subject Heading:	Household Support Fund 3 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 such as those including children, pensioners and care leavers who would otherwise struggle with energy bills, food or other essential living costs, financial support from 1 October 2022 to 31 March 2023.
Financial summary:	A ringfenced government grant of £1,648,150.98 has been made available for the period 1 October 2022 to 31 March 2023 to support local expenditure including administrative costs of the Housing Support Fund 3 2022.
Reason decision is Key	Expenditure of £500,000 or more.
Date notice given of intended decision:	14 September 2022

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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 26 May 2022 the government announced that the Household Support Fund (HSF 3) would be extended from 30 September 2022 to 31 March 2023. As with previous schemes, the funding is intended to support those households most in need with food, energy and water bills.

Havering has been given a funding allocation of £1,648,150.98 to be distributed from 1 October 2022 to 31 March 2023.

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 and align with the Council's Cost of Living strategy.

Recommendations

1. That £603,210 is made available to help support vulnerable and low income households under the Emergency Assistance Scheme.
2. To approve the Emergency Assistance Scheme policy as attached at Appendix E.
3. That £405,000 is allocated from the HSF 3 grant to pay for meals in the February half-term and Easter school holidays for up to 9,000 families eligible for welfare benefit related free school meals between 1 October 2022 and 31 March 2023 providing £15 per child per week.
4. That £260,000 HSF 3 grant is allocated to 5,200 pension age Council Tax payers in receipt of Council Tax Support by way of a £50 credit to their Council Tax accounts which can be transferred to the taxpayer's bank account.
5. That £150,000 from the HSF 3 grant is made available to provide 300 Care leavers with £500.00 each to help with their fuel and food bills.
6. That £40,000 is allocated from the HSF 3 grant to support the provision of Children's accommodation.
7. That £50,000 is made available to support the vulnerable families and children coming from the Ukraine under the Visa Scheme.
8. That £139,940 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 3 grant activities.

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AUTHORITY UNDER WHICH DECISION IS MADE

Part 3 of the Constitution - Responsibility for Functions: Executive 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

1. Introduction

- 1.1 On 26 May 2022, the government announced that the Household Support Fund (HSF 3) would be extended from 30 September 2022 to 31 March 2023 to help those most in need. Appendix A FINAL Household Support Fund Launch letter Oct 2022-Mar 2023 contains details of the launch of the HSF 3 extension.
- 1.2 Guidance has been provided by Government on how the HSF 3 grant should be spent. There have been a number of changes to the guidance compared with previous schemes and these are referred to under the heading **HSF 3 Government Guidance and Grant Conditions** below. Details of the guidance can be found at Appendix B Draft Guidance - Household Support Fund April-Sept 2022.
- 1.3 As with the two previous iterations of the scheme, Government has allocated the same amount of funding, £1,648,150 to Havering to spend on the most vulnerable households to help with essentials such as energy, food and essential bills between 1 October 2022 and 31 March 2023. Appendix C Final Grant Determination - Household Support Fund Oct 2022 – Mar 23 provides the detail of the funding allocation.

2 HSF 3 Government Guidance and Grant Conditions

- 2.1 Government guidance remains similar to previous HSF funding schemes in that councils are expected to use the grant to continue to support households who would otherwise struggle with energy bills, food, water bills and other essential costs. This will cover 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 disabled people and unpaid carers.
- 2.2 The HSF 3 fund should also support groups who are vulnerable to rising prices who may have already been supported through other schemes, for example large families or single-income households.
- 2.3 There are some changes to this iteration of the guidance which are mentioned below.

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- there will be no ringfence of any proportion of funding for any particular cohort of people
- Authorities must operate at least part of their scheme on an application basis to ensure those in need have a route to emergency support.
- Authorities are to particularly consider those groups who may not have benefitted from any of the recent cost of living support and
- Authorities should also consider providing support to disabled people

2.4 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.

2.5 Eligible spend includes the following items:

- Energy and water.
- Food.
- Essentials linked to energy and water. For example period products, warm clothing, soap, blankets, the repair or purchase of equipment such as fridges, freezers, ovens, slow cookers), in recognition that a range of costs may arise which directly affect a household's ability to afford or access energy, food and water.
- Wider essentials. These may include, but are not limited to, support with other bills including broadband or phone bills, clothing, and essential transport-related costs such as repairing a car, buying a bicycle, or paying for fuel.
- Housing costs. In exceptional cases of genuine emergency, where existing housing support schemes do not meet this exceptional need, the Fund can be used to support housing costs.
- Reasonable administrative costs. This includes staff, IT, advertising and print costs.

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

2.7 Councils can also provide a basic safety net to individuals with no recourse to public funds.

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- 2.9 The HSF 3 fund is ring-fenced and cannot be used to support mortgage costs or provide advice services including debt advice.
- 2.10 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.
- 2.11 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.
- 2.12 Authorities will be expected to report expenditure to the DWP in two management information returns on 25 January 2023 and 28 April 2023. Expenditure for disabled people must be recorded as new data requirement for the HSF 3 fund.
- 2.13 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.
- 2.14 A single grant payment will be made in arrears following receipt and verification by the DWP of the management information return. Any underspends cannot be carried forward and any overspends cannot be claimed from government. Therefore funds should be spent by 31 March 2023.
- 2.15 Councils must reference that the grant is funded by the DWP or government in any publicity material, including online channels and media releases.

3 Proposals to spend the HSF 3 Grant

- 3.1 Unlike earlier iterations of the scheme, Government has removed the criteria to ringfence any proportion of funding for any particular cohort of people. HSF 1 funding for October 2021 to March 2022 required 80% of the funding to be spent on low income households with children. The HSF 2 funding conditions for April to September 2022 advised at least 33% of funding should support households with children and 33% of funding is for pensioners.
- 3.2 Government have allowed Authorities to use their local knowledge of residents to maximise assistance to those most in need by removing the ringfence on the percentage spend to any particular cohort.
- 3.3 Havering has developed a local delivery framework and approach which is flexible and ensures the conditions and principles of the Housing Support Fund 3 guidance are fully met.
- 3.4 The proposals for expenditure of the HSF 3 grant are set out below.
- 3.5 Havering Emergency Assistance Scheme £603,210
- 3.6 Havering's Emergency Assistance Scheme is an application based scheme providing emergency support to low income households through cash (BACS)

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payments for food, essential items, repairs and utility bills. Furniture and essential white goods are also available under the scheme.

- 3.7 The scheme's underlying principles align with the HSF 3 guidance and is available to working age and pension age families and individuals who require emergency financial assistance as well as disabled people. Up to ten payments of £100 each per year is available to households for emergency support and to help with the increasing cost of living.
- 3.9 This scheme is well established, popular and particularly effective with more than 5,000 successful applications costing just over £500,000 between April and September 2022. It is expected that demand will rise during the next six months because of the change in weather and the increased cost of living.
- 3.10 In processing claims for emergency assistance, evidence of income is always required and benefits are verified through the Council's and DWP's computer systems.
- 3.11 Disabled people are able to claim emergency assistance and plans are in place to record the expenditure against this cohort as required by the terms of the grant.
- 3.12 In line with government guidance, the Emergency Assistance scheme policy has been revised to assist low income households who are not in receipt of benefits or eligible for the increased cost of living schemes. The low income threshold will be increased from £500 and £350 per week to £673 and £442 per week for families with children and individuals or couples with no resident children respectively. This scheme reform will enable Havering to support struggling households who are ineligible for other cost of living government support.
- 3.13 The Emergency Assistance Scheme policy can be found at Appendix E The Emergency Assistance Scheme Policy 2022
- 3.14 The Disablement Association Barking and Dagenham and Benefit Services partner together to provide the scheme. It is proposed that £603,210 of the HSF 3 grant is allocated to the Emergency Assistance Scheme.
- 3.15 Free school holiday meals for children of eligible families £405,000
- 3.16 Officers seek to ensure that children of families on welfare benefits eligible for free school meals do not go hungry during the school holidays. Allocating funding direct to this cohort will assist reduce child poverty in the borough and free up money for families to spend on other essential items.
- 3.17 In a previous decision and report, council funding was allocated to cover the cost of free school holiday meals for the October half-term and December school holidays.
- 3.18 It is proposed that £405,000 of the HSF 3 fund is used to make payments of £15 per week to up to 9,000 eligible families to help pay for meals during the

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February half-term and Easter 2023 school holidays. This will assist relieve pressure on low income families with children struggling with the increased cost of living.

3.19 Pension Age Council Tax Payers receiving Council Tax Support £260,000

3.20 The government guidance stresses that the HSF 3 fund is intended to cover low income groups including pensioners.

3.21 It is known that older people for many reasons do not always claim what they are entitled to. These reasons can include; lack of awareness, worry about filling in long forms, disclosing personal information or feeling there is always someone worse off than they are.

3.22 With this in mind, it is proposed that pensioners on a low income receive £50 direct to their Council Tax account which can be used to reduce their Council Tax or be transferred direct to their bank account.

3.23 Officers have identified through the Council Tax Support scheme data that there are just under 5,200 pensioner tax payers on low incomes.

3.24 Pensioners will be advised in writing of the £50 payment to their council tax account and will be given the option to have it paid direct to their bank account. This will ensure that low income residents of pension age receive support from the HSF 3 grant.

3.25 Havering Care Leavers £150,000

3.26 Providing Care leavers with support from the previous HSF grants has been successful. The council as the corporate parent was able to engage productively with this vulnerable cohort and improve their circumstances and opportunities.

3.27 £150,000 from the HSF 3 fund will provide 300 Care leavers with £500 to help with fuel, food and essential bills.

3.28 Supporting Families Move from temporary Accommodation £40,000

3.29 Families moving from temporary accommodation incur extra costs settling into a new home. £40,000 can be allocated support to those vulnerable families with children helping to pay food, fuel and other essential bills. There is no other budget available to cover these unplanned extra costs.

3.30 Supporting Vulnerable People from the Ukraine £50,000

3.31 Individuals and families coming to Havering under the Homes for Ukraine Visa Scheme who require immediate assistance can be provided with support through HSF 3 fund. There is no other specific funding available to assist this cohort. Currently, there are 51 Ukraine Visa families known to Havering. It is proposed that £50,000 of the HSF 3 grant is allocated to this endeavour which allows for the increasing number of families moving into the borough.

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3.32 Cost of Administration £139.940

3.33 The administration costs associated with the proposal above are outlined in the table below along with the scheme costs. The administrative costs make up approximately eight and a half per cent of the overall fund.

3.34 Table of proposed HSF 3 expenditure.

Service	Est Admin Cost	Est Scheme Cost
DABD	£50,000	£603,210
Council Tax & Benefits	£44,940	*
Care leavers	£10,000	£150,000
Transactional Services	£10,000	**£40,000
CTS Pensioners	£10,000	£260,000
Admin Support Ukraine	£5,000	£50,000
Holiday Meals Admin	£10,000	£405,000
Sub Total	£139,940	£1,515,210
Grand Total		£1,648,150

* Council Tax & Benefits supports the Emergency Assistance scheme and CTS pensioners

** Transactional Services also support holiday meals and care leavers

3.35 Media and Communications

3.36 A communication plan will be tailored to ensure every cohort is made aware of and can claim the assistance using media they respond to. Targeted communications to homes with pre-paid meters and benefit capped families will also form part of the plan.

3.37 An element of the plan will also focus on older people and encourage them to claim the benefits they are entitled to such as Pensions Credit which opens the door to other benefits such as a free TV license for the over 75s.

3.38 The plan will also encourage disabled people on low incomes to claim emergency assistance.

3.39 Departmental officers 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.

3.40 Frontline workers will also be briefed to share information regarding the funding available to claim above.

OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED

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Allocating HSF 3 funding to food banks and food vouchers was considered by Officers. However, it was felt that the Emergency Assistance, free school holidays meals and other council run schemes were now well established and operating efficiently.

Payments are made by BACs direct to the vulnerable household's bank accounts which is fast and gives residents maximum choice with regard to expenditure. BACs payments are therefore considered a better option than vouchers.

Commissioning external providers to manage the schemes was also considered. It would take some time to prepare and agree requirements and contracts. As the scheme only runs for six months, it is likely plans would not be ready in time to fully administer and distribute the funds. In addition, the costs of administration would increase and this would reduce the money available towards the schemes themselves.

PRE-DECISION CONSULTATION

There is no statutory requirement for a public consultation. SLT members, Children's and Adults Services, DABD (Disablement Association Barking and Dagenham), Citizens Advice, 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: 16 October 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 in accordance with the Council's powers under Section 1 of the Localism Act 2011 whose criteria fully meet the conditions set out for HSF 3 expenditure.

The recommendations within this report adhere to the guidance for the Household Support Fund 3 for families and people of pension age, as well as promoting 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 October 2022 to 31 March 2023.

The amount allocated to the Emergency Assistance Scheme of £603,210 should be sufficient to cover the period to 30 September 2022 and the service will be monitoring expenditure closely. If expenditure should exceed the budget allocated, the emergency assistance scheme reserve can cover the shortfall.

A single grant payment will be made in arrears on the receipt of a fully completed and verified management information (MI) return. The final MI return is due to the DWP on 28 April 2023. 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.

The Council is committed to the Equalities Duty in the provision and commissioning of its services. An Equality & Health Impact Assessment is attached at Appendix D EqHIA Household Support Fund 3 2022.

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 during the cost of living crisis.

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, pensioners and vulnerable residents to ensure they are adequately fed and warm during the winter months and the cost of living crisis.

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.

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BACKGROUND PAPERS

APPENDICIES

Appendix A FINAL Household Support Fund Launch letter Oct 2022-Mar 2023

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

Appendix C Final Grant Determination - Household Support Fund Oct 2022 – Mar 23

Appendix D EqHIA Household Support Fund 3 2022

Appendix E Emergency Assistance Scheme Policy 2022

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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 _____