



City of Westminster

Cabinet Member Report

Meeting or Decision Maker:	Cabinet Member for Finance and Council Reform
Date:	21 October 2022
Title:	Household Support Fund October 2022 to March 2023
Wards Affected:	All
Policy Context:	The Cost of Living Strategy 2022
Cabinet Member:	Not required for Cabinet Member reports
Key Decision:	Key decision. An entry has been included for 28 days on the list of forthcoming decisions
Financial Summary:	There are no financial implications for the council as the council's expenditure, including for administration, will be met by the government's grant funding allocation. There will be a minor cashflow implication, as the government's funding is to be paid in arrears
Report of:	Gerald Almeroth: Executive Director of Finance Resources

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report seeks approval for a number of processes to allocate the government's Household Support Fund October 2022 to March 2023 to the borough's most vulnerable residents and in line with national Guidance¹.
- 1.2 A summary of the proposed spend is below which aims to balance use of the fund across all the different groups in need of help.

	£	No assisted (estimated)	Delivered by	Key recipients
TARGETED HELP				
1. Families eligible for free school meals during the holiday periods / other vulnerable families	£966,896	23,348	WCC: Children's Services	Families
2. Range of vulnerable young people, such as care leavers	£22,000	440	WCC: Children's Services	Vulnerable young people
3. Households receiving Housing Benefit that did not benefit from the government help of £650 paid to those in receipt of certain means tested benefits	£623,150	2,795	WCC: Range of officers in Innovation and Change and Finance and Resources	Low income single people / couples (in and out of work) Older people
APPLICATION / CRITERIA BASED HELP				
4. Local Hardship Fund with Citizens Advice Westminster	£254,461	1,000	Citizens Advice Westminster and WCC's Local Payment Support Team	All low income households
5. Grants to food charities	£50,000	800	Charities plus, WCC's Policy and Projects / Communities Teams for grants administration	All low income households
6. Local Support Payment Scheme	Flexible (subject to need / monitoring)		WCC: Local Payment Support Team	All low income households
OTHER				
7. Contingency	£5,000			
8. Administration	£30,000			
TOTAL	£1,951,507	27,942		

¹ www.gov.uk/government/publications/household-support-fund-guidance-for-local-councils

1.3 Help is mainly in the form of supermarket vouchers which are in lieu of energy support.

2. Recommendations

2.1 That the Cabinet Member for Finance and Council Reform:

2.1.1 Approves the council to utilise each of the processes outlined in Section 5 of this report to allocate the council's funding allocation (£1,951,507) to the borough's most vulnerable residents; and

2.1.2 Delegates authority to the Director of Revenues and Benefits to flex the level of funding allocated to each process, including voucher amounts, in order that the council's funding allocations is fully utilised before the government's deadline and to respond to any changing circumstances.

3. Reasons for Decision

3.1 The recommended processes outlined in section 5 of this report seek to deliver support in accordance with the Government's guidance to the council's most vulnerable residents taking account of a limited funding envelope.

4. Background, including Policy Context

4.1 Government has provided local authorities with a broad discretion as to how to allocate the fund. Key points from 'Household Support Fund: Draft Guidance for County Councils and Unitary Authorities in England (1 October 2022 to 31 March 2023)² are:

- There is an expectation that the Fund is used to support those in the most need and particularly those who may not be eligible for other government support
- Local authorities should prioritise helping people with energy bills but the fund can be used to help households with a wide range of essentials such as food, water bills, energy efficiency measures and housing costs in a genuine emergency
- Some of the fund must be used for application based support which has an eligibility criteria and which is clear and accessible and clearly advertised
- The funding needs to be spent by March 2023 and cannot be carried forward.

4.2 The proposed spend of the Fund set out in section 5 is in line with the council's Cost of Living Strategy July 2022³ which sets out an eight point plan

² www.gov.uk/government/publications/household-support-fund-guidance-for-local-councils

³ [Cost of living support hub and strategy | Westminster City Council](#)

to tackle the crisis including targeting the most vulnerable and coordinating our efforts with partners. Around 31,000 households have been identified as most at risk made up of single people in and out of work, families with children, including lone parents, older people and those with disabilities.

5. Proposed methods of allocation (the local delivery framework)

5.1 Payment approach

Direct payments will not be made to residents, as this increases the risk of fraud and also that the payments will not be utilised for their intended purposes. Whilst the Government have asked local authorities to seek to cover energy costs, there are limited methods of paying for fuel directly, other than where residents have prepayment meters, and as such the council proposes to assist households in the form of supermarket vouchers on the basis that savings made by the resident on food costs can be utilised by them towards their energy costs. This approach has worked well for the delivery of the Household Support Fund.

5.2 TARGETED DIRECT SUPPORT

These allocations are based on recognised indicators of need.

5.3 Free School Meals (for holiday periods) / vulnerable families

5.3.1 **Eligibility Criteria/Data Sources:** Based on national criteria⁴, an estimated 5,515 Westminster families are eligible for free school meals (FSM) as they have low incomes. These families will receive help for the holiday periods (two half terms and the Christmas and Easter 2023 holiday). Given the acute pressures faced by low income families the FSM allocation has been updated from £3 per day per child to £3.50.

5.3.2 Other help will also be provided to low-income families that are vulnerable and known to and working with Children's Services. These include families known to Early Help who are not eligible for statutory Section 17 subsistence funding, vulnerable families with pre-school children and families supported by the Children's Services with no recourse to public funds and meeting the criteria for assistance in the guidance.

Method: Supermarket Vouchers

Value/ numbers assisted: See below

⁴ www.gov.uk/apply-free-school-meals

	£	No (estimated)
Free school meals (holiday periods)	£924,396	22,661
Other vulnerable families	£42,500	687
Total	£966,896	23,348

Timescale: Vouchers relating to FSM will be sent around each holiday period and the other vouchers for vulnerable groups will be issued in early 2023.

Administered by: Children's Services

5.4 Single Vulnerable Young Adults

5.4.1 **Eligibility Criteria/Data Sources** Assistance will be provided to vulnerable young people known to Children's Services who are affected by the cost of living crisis, including Care Leavers, especially those in their own accommodation, and those young people known to the Youth Offending Service and the Integrated Gangs and Exploitation Unit.

Method: Supermarket vouchers

Value: £22,000

	£	No (estimated)
Single care leavers	£17,000	340
Other single young people	£5,000	100
Total	£22,000	440

Timescale: Vouchers will be issued in c. January / February 2023 via the allocated worker to those young people that Children's Services have identified as being vulnerable.

Administered by: Children's Services

5.5 Households not benefiting from government support

5.5.1 **Eligibility Criteria/Data Sources:** Around 2,795 households (identified by DWP or Lower Income Family Tracker (LIFT) data) are in receipt of housing benefit but did not receive £650 directly from government as they weren't in receipt of the qualifying means tested benefits. Estimates suggest that c. 888 are working age single households or couples and c.1,907 are older people. This figure could change depending on when the data is extracted. Payment amounts will replicate those in 5.7.3.

Method: Supermarket Vouchers

Value: £623,150

Timescale: December 2022 – February 2023

Administered by: A range of council officers in Innovation and Change and in the Finance and Resources team

5.6 APPLICATION / REFERRAL BASED SUPPORT

5.7 Local Hardship Fund

In addition to the targeted support, a local application based fund will be available, to assist around 1,000 households that have not been identified for the targeted help above or are still struggling after it.

5.7.1 Eligibility Criteria/Data sources: Households can apply to the fund through Citizens Advice Westminster (CAW) or through one of its c. 40 partners on its referral platform which work widely with low income residents across the city. CAB will then recommend low income households in financial difficulty for the fund to the council for help. The fund will generally only be available to households:

- That are engaging with the CAB or its referral partners in wider advice and support to assist them through the cost of living crisis
- With incomes of £21,500 or below; or that are in receipt of a welfare benefit, but further households will be considered in exceptional circumstances.

Method: Supermarket Vouchers

Value: £254,461

Voucher amounts: As in 5.7.3 below, which are the same amounts as for the previous scheme

Timescale: November 2022 – February 2023 (estimated) or until the allocation is spent.

Administered by: Partnership between CAW and the council's Local Support Payment Team (LSPT). Following recommendations from the CAW, the LSPT will conduct checks and issue the vouchers. The approach has worked successfully for the previous scheme

5.7.2 For all applicants, duplicate payments will only be made in exceptional circumstances and subject to CAW's discretion. Where agreed, they will not be made until one month after the initial allocation.

5.7.3 Payments amounts are below. It is acknowledged they cannot meet the scale of the rises in the cost of living, but they are aimed to provide a balance between meaningful support and helping as many households in need as possible.

Voucher amounts	
Household type	£
Singles	£150
Couples	£180
Pension age person in household	£250
Disabled person in household	£250
Carer in household	£250
Children in household	£300
Large households (over 4 people)	£320

5.8 **Local Support Payment Scheme (LSPS)**

The council has an established application based scheme to help people in receipt of certain benefits in emergencies⁵, with a budget of £600k per annum. An allocation from the Household Support Fund may be used to increase its capacity, subject to an available budget and demand.

5.8.1 **Eligibility Criteria/Data Sources:** Help for tenants is generally limited to supporting them with emergency expenses related to moves i.e. with white goods, essential items and removals etc. Families and vulnerable people facing exceptional hardship can apply for help with various emergency costs like replacement of essential white goods and clothing. There is overlap between the help people can receive through the LPST and the Household Support Fund.

Method:	Vouchers
Value:	Flexible (subject to budget availability / monitoring)
Payments:	Support is generally in the form of vouchers for goods or replacement second hand goods / furniture
Timescale:	Flexible (subject to budget availability / monitoring)
Administered by:	The Local Support Payment Team

⁵ www.westminster.gov.uk/benefits/apply-local-support-payment

5.9 **Food Charities**

There is a range of food support in Westminster which is summarised on the Cost of Living Support Hub and grants will be available to organisations to help them manage rising demand.

5.9.1 **Eligibility Criteria/Data Sources:** Each of the charities supported have their own criteria for accessing food support. An estimated 800 low income households will be assisted.

Method: One off grant to each of the organisations below with outputs and monitoring arrangements set in Service Level Agreements

Value:	Westbourne Park Pantry ⁶	£10,000
	Abbey Centre Pantry ⁷	£10,000
	The HAFs Academy Pantry (which is starting up)	£10,000
	The North Paddington Foodbank ⁸	<u>£20,000</u>
	Total	£50,000

Timescale: November 2022

Administered by: The council's Policy and Projects and Communities Teams.

OTHER

5.10 **Contingency:** £5k has been set aside to provide funding flexibility and to address any new or exceptional circumstances as they arise.

5.11 **Administration:** £30,000 has been identified for administration, which includes the administrative costs of CAW to administer the Hardship Fund. Overall the anticipated administration costs are less than 5% of the overall budget.

5.12 **Appeals:** There will be no formal appeal process, but households can raise complaints about the administration of the fund through the council's Corporate Complaints policy⁹.

⁶ www.yourlocalpantry.co.uk/find-a-pantry/westbourne-park-pantry/

⁷ www.yourlocalpantry.co.uk/find-a-pantry/the-abbey-centre-pantry/

⁸ www.npfoodbank.org.uk/

⁹ www.westminster.gov.uk/about-council/complaints#complaints-policy

6. Financial Implications

- 6.1 There are no financial implications on the council's General Fund, including for administration, as the maximum amount payable, including administration costs, will be met by the government's grant funding allocation. There will be a minor cashflow implication, as the government's funding is to be paid in arrears.
- 6.2 The council is monitoring the impact of the cost of living crisis and has already agreed a package of interventions over and above the Households Support Fund. The proposed spend of the fund could be topped up subject to need and available budgets.

7. Legal Implications

- 7.1 Under Section 31 of the Local Government Act 2003 '*A Minister of the Crown may pay a grant to a local authority in England towards expenditure incurred or to be incurred by it.*'
- 7.2 In addition to this, the council has a general power under Section 1 of the Localism Act 2011 to do anything that an individual may generally do provided it is not prohibited by other legislation and the power is exercised in accordance with the limitations specified in the Act. The recommendations and reasons for the distribution and allocation of the funding as per section 5 of this report are within the scope of the Household Support Fund grant.
- 7.3 The council therefore is able to receive and accept the grant and utilise it as per the contents of the report and in line with the principles set out in the government guidelines.
- 7.4 The Council must have regard to the Equality Act 2010 in administering the schemes.

8. Consultation and communications

- 8.1 This report has been reviewed and agreed by senior officers in:
- Finance & Resources
 - Children services
 - Adult services
 - Public Health
 - Innovation and Change
- 8.2 CAW has been consulted with on the approach to the Hardship Fund as have all the food charities receiving support in 5.9. The general approach has been discussed with the local Food and Energy Network.

- 8.3 Vouchers to households identified for direct support will where possible be accompanied by information on wider advice and support available to assist them during the cost of living crisis.
- 8.4 Details of the criteria based Hardship Fund will be on the council's Cost of Living Support Hub and the CAW website and it will be promoted through CAW and its partners to ensure it reaches all sections of the community and is accessible.

9. Carbon Impact

- 9.1 Although the fund can be used for small energy efficiency measures, it is not proposed that an allocation be made for this purpose as small scale measures are already available as part of the Green Doctor service and Warm Homes Grants also offer measures. Details of these services are available on the council website.

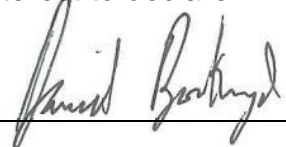
10. Equalities implications

- 10.1 An Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA), initial screening, has been completed on the proposed spend and it has identified groups, using benefit data, that are more likely to have low incomes, compared with the population overall and therefore be in the greatest need. These are:
- People that are out of work, often as they are disabled and having caring responsibilities
 - The 45 – 64 and over 65 age groups
 - Non white households
 - People with disabilities / or in poor health
 - Men
 - Adult only households.
- 10.2 However the EIA notes that the impact of the cost of living crisis is far reaching and that this general data cannot be considered in isolation and masks the impact on other groups such as low income households with children.
- 10.3 The EIA acknowledges that the fund cannot help all households financially struggling given the scale of the problem and the level of funding. The voucher amounts are therefore not intended to fully meet needs but assist struggling households. The council's Cost of Living Strategy aims to complement the funding and to help mitigate the impact of the crisis more broadly.

For completion by the **Cabinet Member for Finance and Council Reform**

Declaration of Interest

I have no interest to declare in respect of this report

Signed:  Date: 24 October 2022

NAME: **Councillor David Boothroyd**

State nature of interest if any

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(N.B: If you have an interest you should seek advice as to whether it is appropriate to make a decision in relation to this matter)

For the reasons set out above, I agree the recommendation(s) in the report entitled

Household Support Fund

Signed .....

Cabinet Member for Finance and Council Reform

Date ...24 October 2022.....

If you have any additional comment which you would want actioned in connection with your decision you should discuss this with the report author and then set out your comment below before the report and this pro-forma is returned to the Secretariat for processing.

Additional comment:

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If you do not wish to approve the recommendations, or wish to make an alternative decision, it is important that you consult the report author, the Head of Legal & Democratic Services, Chief Operating Officer and, if there are resources implications, the Director of Human Resources (or their representatives) so that (1) you can be made aware of any further relevant considerations that you should take into account before making the decision and (2) your reasons for the decision can be properly identified and recorded, as required by law.

Note to Cabinet Member: Your decision will now be published and copied to the Members of the relevant Policy & Scrutiny Committee. If the decision falls within the criteria for call-in, it will not be implemented until five working days have elapsed

from publication to allow the Policy and Scrutiny Committee to decide whether it wishes to call the matter in.

Background Papers

If you have any queries about this Report or wish to inspect any of the Background Papers, please contact;

Cecily Herdman, Principal Policy Officer

Email: cherdman@westminster.gov.uk

BACKGROUND PAPERS:

Background papers are referenced as footnotes throughout this report.

The Equalities Impact Assessment Screening can be viewed on request.

Appendix A:

Other Implications

1. Resource Implications

The proposed spend of the fund takes into account administrative costs.

2. Business Plan Implications

There are no implications.

3. Risk Management Implications

As acknowledged in this Report the Household Support Fund is unlikely to alleviate cost of living pressures on all the 31,000 low income households at risk from the cost of living crisis across Westminster. However it is part of a wider package of support set out in the Cost of Living Strategy and on the council's website. Council interventions are being reviewed on an ongoing basis.

4. Health and Wellbeing Impact Assessment including Health and Safety Implications

It is acknowledged that the cost of living crisis may have a significant impact on the health and wellbeing of residents, particularly those at risk from living in a cold home such as older and disabled people and those with young children. As set out in this Report – the Household Support Fund is part of a wider package of support for households set out in the Cost of Living Strategy. A key complementary project is the Winter in the City programme which lets households know about warm and safe spaces they can access over the colder months.

5. Crime and Disorder Implications

There are no implications.

6. Impact on the Environment

There are no implications.

7. Human Rights Implications

There are no implications.

8. Energy Measure Implications

There are no implications.

9. Counter Terrorism and Security Implications

There are no implications.