

## **HOUSEHOLD SUPPORT FUND – EALING POLICY**

### **1. Introduction**

Household Support Fund (HSF) has been made available to councils in England to support those most in need to help with significantly rising living costs. This funding covers the period 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024 inclusive. The Council has discretion on exactly how this funding is used within the scope set out in the DWP guidance. The expectation is that it should primarily be used to support households in the most need particularly those who may not be eligible for the Government's Cost of Living Support and for those who despite the support find themselves vulnerable to the rising prices. Energy bills may be of particular concern to low-income households during the period of the scheme and Local Authorities should especially consider how they can support households with the cost of energy. It can also be used to support households with essential costs related to those items and with wider essential costs. In exceptional cases of genuine emergency, it can additionally be used to support housing costs where existing housing support schemes do not meet this exceptional need.

The Ealing allocation under the scheme is £ 5,317,610.

### **2. Objectives and principles of the scheme**

- 2.1 The objective of the HSF is to provide support to vulnerable households in most need of support to help with significantly rising living costs.
- 2.2 Funds should be spent or committed before 31 March 2024 and cannot be held over for future usage.
- 2.3 When administering this scheme, the Council has followed principles laid out in DWP guidance as below:
  - use discretion on how to identify and support those most in need, taking into account a wide range of information.
  - use the funding from 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024 to meet immediate needs and help those who are struggling to afford energy and water bills, food, and other related essentials – the Council can also use the funding 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 with third parties, including where necessary appropriate other local services. This may include social workers, housing and family support services, and may incorporate intelligence and data from wider children's social care systems to help identify and support individuals, families and households within the scope of the HSF.

2.4 The following guidelines have been issued by DWP on how the funding should be used:

- The Council must operate an application-based service for support to ensure those in need have a route to emergency support which is clearly advertised to residents.
- The Council can also proactively identify households who will benefit from support. Where this is the case, the Council should consider how they can ensure that they are focusing on those in the most need. There is no requirement for the Council to undertake a means test or conduct a benefit check unless this specifically forms part of the Council's local eligibility criteria.
- However, in relation to housing costs, the Council must establish whether other forms of support are available to the household, such as Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs) or Homelessness Prevention Grant.

### 3. Eligible spend under HSF:

3.1 Eligible spend includes:

- **Energy and water.** HSF should primarily be used to support with energy bills for any form of fuel that is used for the purpose of domestic heating, cooking or lighting, including oil or portable gas cylinders. It can also be used to support with water bills including for drinking, washing, cooking, and sanitary purposes and sewerage.
- **Food.** HSF should also primarily be used to provide support with food whether in kind or through vouchers or cash.
- **Essentials linked to energy and water.** HSF can be used to provide support with essentials linked to energy and water (for example warm clothing, blankets, the 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. The Council can consider supporting households on low incomes to repair or replace white goods and appliances with more energy efficient ones, or to invest in simple energy efficiency measures which will pay back quickly, such as insulating a hot water tank, fitting draft excluders to a front door, or replacing inefficient lightbulbs or white goods. The intention of this is to provide sustainable support which could result in both immediate and long-lasting savings for the household.
- **Wider essentials.** HSF can be used to support wider essential needs not linked to energy and water should the Council consider this appropriate in their area. These may include, but are not limited to, support with other bills including broadband or phone bills, clothing, period and hygiene products, essential transport-related costs such as repairing a car, buying a bicycle, or paying for fuel. This list is not exhaustive.
- **Housing Costs.** In exceptional cases of genuine emergency where existing housing support schemes do not meet this exceptional need, HSF can be used to support housing costs.
- **Advice services.** HSF may be used to provide supplementary advice services to award recipients, including debt and benefit advice, where the

Council considers this appropriate. However, the primary intention of HSF is to provide crisis support for households, and it is expected that any advice services to complement this and that not a large portion of funding is spent on advice services. There is an expectation that there is a connection between the funding provided for advice services and the practical support provided under HSF.

- **Reasonable administrative costs** including staffing costs, advertising and publicity, web page designs and small IT changes.

3.2 The HSF cannot be used to provide mortgage support, though homeowners could still qualify for the other elements (such as energy, food, water, essentials linked to energy and water and wider essentials). Where a homeowner is having difficulty with their mortgage payments, they should contact their lender as soon as possible to discuss their circumstances as lenders will have a set procedure to assist.

#### **4. Individuals with No Recourse to Public Funds**

4.1 The Council can provide a basic safety net support to an individual, regardless of their immigration status, if there is a genuine care need that does not arise solely from destitution, for example if:

- there are community care needs
- they have serious health problems
- there is a risk to a child's wellbeing

4.2 The Council must use their judgement to decide what legal powers and funding can be used to support individuals who are ineligible for public funds or statutory housing assistance.

#### **5. Legislation**

This policy is developed in line with DWP guidance noting that as per their guidance the Household Support Fund is being classified as Local Welfare Provision (LWP) and local authorities (LAs) who have signed and returned the relevant section (Annex C) of the DWP/LA Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) have legal permission to access DWP's Searchlight portal. This portal provides information on individual citizen's entitlement to (and confirms receipt of) DWP welfare benefits. Therefore, this data can be used to help LAs identify those families and individuals to whom to target this support.

#### **6. Qualifying criteria and awards**

6.1 The Council has flexibility to deliver the support in a variety of different ways, including direct cash payments, vouchers, giving meals to those in need or boosting funding for organizations already doing so.

6.2 Council also has the flexibility to identify which vulnerable households are in most need of support and apply their own discretion when identifying eligibility.

6.3 The Council must operate an application-based service for support to ensure those in need have a route to emergency support which is clearly advertised to residents. This requirement will be fulfilled by the Council's local welfare assistance with expanded eligibility criteria.

6.4 In order to maximise the grant for support payments to residents of Ealing and to keep the administration of the grant to minimum, the Council will administer the grant and provide support in the following way:

#### **6.5 Support for families eligible for FSMs where eligibility is based on low income (excludes universal support)**

- The Council will automatically issue awards to parents of children eligible for free school meals where their eligibility is based on low income excluding universal infant free school meals, which are not income related.
- The supermarket vouchers will be issued in May 2023, July 2023, October 2023, December 2023, February 2024 and March 2024.
- The value of the vouchers issued May 2023, July 2023, October 2023, February 24 and March 24 will be £15 per week per child.
- The value of the vouchers issued in December 2023 will be £20 per week per child.
- The Council will use the Free School Meals database to identify those who are eligible.
- The Council will automatically issue supermarket vouchers to families identified as entitled to free school meals to cover period of school holidays to support families with food during the periods when children do not receive school meals.
- The vouchers will be distributed electronically. Where this is not possible, The Council will issue vouchers via other means necessary, i.e. text or letter.
- London wide agreement has been reached that each borough will support the children attending the schools in the borough. This is to ensure that all children eligible for free school meals are being supported.

#### **6.6 Support for families with children under the age of 5**

- The Council will use its Council Tax Reduction and Housing Benefit data to identify households with children under 5 and will issue supermarket vouchers.
- The supermarket vouchers will be issued in May 2023, July 2023, October 2023, December 2023, February 2024 and March 2024.
- The value of the vouchers issued May 2023, July 2023, October 2023, February 2024 and March 2024 will be £15 per week per household.
- The value of the vouchers issued in December 2023 will be £20 per week per household.
- The vouchers will be distributed electronically. Where this is not possible, The Council will issue vouchers via other means necessary, i.e. text or letter.

### **6.7 Support for care leavers**

- The Council will support its care leavers and will automatically issue supermarket vouchers.
- The supermarket vouchers will be issued in May 2023, July 2023, October 2023, December 2023, February 2024 and March 2024.
- The value of the supermarket vouchers issued will be £50 each time.

### **6.8 Support for households in receipt of Housing Benefit and/or Council Tax Reduction who are not in receipt of DWP benefits or tax credits and thus not entitled to DWP cost of living payments**

- The Council will issue two payments to households in receipt of Housing Benefit and/or Council Tax reduction and therefore those who have not been entitled to the Cost-of-Living Payments for those on means tested DWP benefits or Tax Credits.
- The Council will use their Housing Benefit and Council Tax Reduction data sets to identify households who have not been eligible for the above payments.
- The awards will be issued as supermarket vouchers.
- The value of each award will be £175 per identified household and will be paid in October 2023 and February 2024.

### **6.9 Support households where one or more household member is receiving non-residential care and where the Council makes a contribution to their care fees due to the low income and/or high cost of care package**

- The Council will use their Social Care data sets to identify households eligible for payments.
- The awards will be issued as post office payments.
- The value of each award will be £100 per identified household and will be paid in October 2023 and February 2024.

### **6.10 Support for other vulnerable households with or without children, households who do not qualify for automatic vouchers and/or those who need additional support with other essential items**

- 6.10.1 Local Welfare Assistance (LWA) will provide support to other vulnerable households in the borough and will support for families with food, utilities and other essentials including sanitary products, warm clothing, soap, blankets, boiler/service repair; purchase of equipment including fridges, freezers,

ovens, etc. This includes households whose rent includes ineligible services related to these items.

6.10.2 There will be two routes for LWA awards:

- Route 1:

Individual customers will be required to make an application for LWA and the application and LWA eligibility criteria will be expanded until 31 March 2024 to take into account eligibility criteria of the HSF.

- Route 2:

Referral from another Service, in particular, Social Care or Housing where the department identified an individual's genuine need for support with food, utilities and other essentials.

6.10.3 Full eligibility criteria for LWA have been outlined in the LWA policy for 2023/24.

6.10.4 Boiler service and repairs under LWA: Where a customer makes an application for a boiler/service repair, two quotes will be required before the final decision on the award is made. The payments for boiler/service repairs will be capped at maximum of £1,500. Alternatively, the team may refer the case to a handyman scheme under Healthy Homes initiative and if the boiler cannot be repaired, the Healthy Homes may assist the customer in getting a boiler replaced under their scheme.

If the property is rented, it is generally the responsibility of the landlord to carry out boiler repairs and replacements, therefore awards towards boiler repairs will only be considered for owner occupiers.

6.10.5 Housing Costs under LWA: These will only be paid in cases of exceptional emergency where existing housing costs schemes do not meet this exceptional need (eligibility for Housing Benefit, Universal Credit, DHP and Homelessness Prevention Grant needs to be considered in the first instance) and the applicant is at high risk of eviction. Help with housing cost will be provided under the HSF as follows:

- Where an application for LWA has been made for housing costs and the emergency need cannot be covered through any other fund.
- Though a referral process directly from the team administering DHP where DHP cannot be awarded but the individual is at risk of eviction.
- Through a referral process from another Council department, ie. Housing, Social Services or other.

### **6.11 Support provided via voluntary sector**

The Council will also provide funding to voluntary sector to support individuals with eligible items under the HSF, provided the support does not duplicate the form of support provided by the Council. Voluntary sector organisations will be responsible for setting out their own eligibility criteria based on the needs of the communities they support.

The grants for voluntary sector will be distributed via an application process and voluntary organisations will need to demonstrate that their support meets the grant conditions and other Council requirements before the payment is awarded.

## **7 Identification of cases and application process**

7.1 The Council will identify families eligible for support from its own data and according to eligibility criteria set out in point 6 of the policy.

7.2 Residents will also be able to make further application to LWA for other essential items in line with LWA policy.

7.3 Where possible, other services will be identifying individuals and households with genuine need of support under the HSF and referring these to LWA for payments.

## **8 Evidence/verification**

8.1 Where possible, the Council will issue payments automatically and no further evidence or verification will be required under the scheme as the identity and other information would have been verified for free school meals and benefit purposes.

8.2 The Council will undertake verification of LWA applications in accordance with existing verification processes for LWA scheme.

## **9 Decisions**

9.1 Vouchers will be issued to those identified as eligible through Council records.

9.2 Vouchers will be distributed electronically. In cases where vouchers cannot be issued electronically, the Council will issue the voucher via post.

9.3 Cash via Post Office payments will be issued to those eligible as decided by the Council.

9.4 LWA payments will be issued under the agreed LWA eligibility criteria and timescales.

9.5 Notifications of awards will be issued either via email or where an email address is not available, customers will be notified via letter.

## **10 Backdating requests**

There will be no backdating of entitlement to HSF and only those who meet the eligibility criteria at the time of issuing payments will be issued with awards.

## **11 Fraud**

11.1 As the Council is identifying eligible customers from its own records, the risk of fraud is low.

11.2 LWA applicants will have the information verified under the current LWA process.

11.3 The voucher provider will provide the Council with reports on the codes redeemed which can then be verified against the records of codes issued.

## **12 Publicity**

The Council will make every effort to publicise the scheme through the Council website, schools, social media and other available channels. The Council will also follow mandatory requirements for publicity as set out by DWP as follows:

- It is mandatory for the Council to reference that the grant is funded by the DWP or the UK Government in any publicity material, including online channels and media releases.
- It is mandatory for the Council to make public their plans for HSF, including how and when they intend to deliver the application-based portion of their scheme. This should be through a website page dedicated to the HSF headed with 'Household Support Fund' on the Council's website.
- This webpage must be easily accessible for residents and outline the Council's plans for funding, including with details of who is eligible in the area, as well as how and when residents might be able to apply for the application-based element of the scheme. Links to the Government's [Cost of Living Hub](#) should be included, as well as a specific reference that the grant is funded by the DWP or the UK Government.

## **13 Appeals**



- 13.1 There is no statutory right of appeal to the automatic awards made to recipients identified by the Council as requiring additional support.
- 13.2 Any award will be at the absolute discretion of the Strategic Director, Corporate Resources, in accordance with the award criteria, and his decision will be final.
- 13.3 Those who make an application for support through LWA have a right to ask for the decision to be reviewed under the current LWA policy.

## 14 Funding

- 14.1 Ealing Council's allocation for Household Support Fund is £5,317,610. There is no separate grant towards administration costs and some of the grant can be used towards administering the scheme as long as the cost is 'reasonable'. The administration costs can include: staff costs, advertising and publicity, web page design, printing applications and small IT changes to facilitate MI production.
- 14.2 Any unspent funds will have to be paid back to DWP.

## 15 Management Information Returns

- 15.1 The Council is required to make one Statement of Grant Usage and management information (MI) returns. The deadline for completing this return is shown in the table below.

<b>MI Return</b>	<b>Reporting period: from</b>	<b>Reporting period: to</b>	<b>Deadline</b>
Interim 1	1 April 2023	30 June 2023	21 July 2023
Interim 2	1 April 2023	30 September 2023	20 October 2023
Interim 3	1 April 2023	31 December 2023	26 January 2024
Final Return	1 April 2023	31 March 2024	26 April 2024

- 15.2 Completed MI returns should be sent to [lawelfare.pdt@dwp.gov.uk](mailto:lawelfare.pdt@dwp.gov.uk)
- 15.3 Authorities should use the standard MI reporting template provided, which incorporates the Statement of Grant Usage.

15.4 The submissions need to be signed off by Chief Finance Officer.