



Reading
Borough Council
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DECISION BOOK

Issue: 641 Date: 19 OCTOBER 2021

Decisions set out in the book have been made under delegated powers by the Chief Executive, Executive Directors or the Chief Finance Officer and Monitoring Officer, in consultation either with the relevant committee or Lead Councillor.

The Decision Book process has been altered to suspend the current Councillors' call-in arrangements within the 10-day period after its publication and replace it with the ability during that period for three Councillors to request a retrospective review of the decision in writing to the Head of Legal and Democratic Services.

The decision book can be accessed on the Council's website - <https://democracy.reading.gov.uk/mgListOfficerDecisions.aspx?bcr=1&BAM=0>

The officer reports accompanying the decisions are attached.

Contact:	Richard Woodford	Committee Services
Tel:		0118 937 2332
e-mail:		richard.woodford@reading.gov.uk

DECISION BOOK - ISSUE 641 - 19 OCTOBER 2021

1. HOUSEHOLD SUPPORT FUND

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1. HOUSEHOLD SUPPORT FUND	COUNCILLOR BROCK	BOROUGHWIDE	1

This report sets out the decision to use newly allocated Household Support Funding (previously known as the Covid Local Support Grant and the Covid Winter Grant Scheme) to support vulnerable families and individuals.

It is the decision of the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Leader of the Council that Phase 1 of the £1,130,648.94 Household Support Fund will be allocated as follows:

- (a) A targeted food voucher scheme for families with school age children eligible for Pupil Premium Free School Meals, vulnerable children up to nursery age and care leavers (1 x £20 voucher per child) for each week of the October half term, Christmas Holiday, and February half term (2022);
- (b) An Energy Voucher scheme to all individuals and families on the Council Tax Reduction scheme.

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL
REPORT BY DEPUTY CHIEF EXECUTIVE

LEAD COUNCILLOR:	COUNCILLOR BROCK		
DATE:	19 OCTOBER 2021		
TITLE:	HOUSEHOLD SUPPORT FUND		
SERVICE:	CORPORATE IMPROVEMENT AND CUSTOMER SERVICES	WARDS:	BOROUGHWIDE
AUTHOR:	ISABEL EDGAR	TEL:	07923 272292
JOB TITLE:	ASSISTANT DIRECTOR FOR CORPORATE IMPROVEMENT AND CUSTOMER SERVICES	E-MAIL:	isabel.edgar@reading.gov.uk

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report sets out the decision to use newly allocated Household Support Funding (previously known as the Covid Local Support Grant and the Covid Winter Grant Scheme) to support vulnerable families and individuals. The funding amount allocated to the Council by the Department for Work and Pensions is £1,130,648.94. The fund must be spent between 6th October and 31st March 2021.
- 1.2 In summary the Grant Conditions are to provide support to households who would otherwise struggle to buy food, pay essential utility bills, or meet other essential living costs or housing costs (in exceptional cases of genuine emergency). This report sets out the decision to use newly allocated Household Support Funding (previously known as the Covid Local Support Grant and the Covid Winter Grant Scheme). The funding amount allocated to the Council by the Department for Work and Pensions is £1,130,648.94. The fund must be spent between 6th October and 31st March 2021.
- 1.3 The scheme for this funding is set out in section 3.
- 1.4 The following five Decision Books have been completed relating to this funding stream:
- January (issue 620, dated 7 January 2021)
 - March (issue 624, dated 12 March)
 - April (issue 631, dated 27 April)
 - June (issue 634, dated 17 June)
 - July (issue 637 Dated 29 July)

2.0 DECISION

2.1 It is the decision of the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Leader of the Council that Phase 1 of the £1,130,648.94 Household Support Fund will be allocated as follows:

- (a) A targeted food voucher scheme for families with school age children eligible for Pupil Premium Free School Meals, vulnerable children up to nursery age and care leavers (1 x £20 voucher per child) for each week of the October half term, Christmas Holiday, and February half term (2022)**
- (b) An Energy Voucher scheme to all individuals and families on the Council Tax Reduction scheme.**

3. BACKGROUND

Grant Scheme

3.1 DWP (Department of Work and Pensions) have over the past 18 months provided several rounds of grant funding related to provision of food and fuel support. The details of these can be found in the previous 5 decision books.

3.2 Following feedback from LA's to the DWP the funding criteria has been reviewed to allow a broader range of vulnerable children, adults, and families to benefit from the grant. The new spending scheme outlined below takes the new criteria into account.

3.3 The Council agreed to utilise the grant as follows:

3.4 Food Voucher Scheme

3.5 Provide food vouchers to families with school age children eligible for Pupil Premium Free School Meals, vulnerable children up to nursery age and care leavers to cover the October half term, Christmas holiday and February half term (2022).

3.6 Approximately 5200 children will be eligible for the funding which will provide a £20 voucher per child per week during the school holidays. If 100% of families take up the voucher scheme this would total £416,000. Based on previous schemes the take up is between 90-100% depending on the cohort of families receiving the voucher. Every effort will be made to promote the scheme via schools and our Voluntary and Community Sector networks to ensure that families benefit from the vouchers.

3.7 The infrastructure remains in place for BFfC (Brighter Future for Children) to deliver this scheme via schools. An administration charge £5k is proposed for the food voucher scheme (approx. 1.5%).

3.8 Energy Voucher Scheme

3.9 Provide an energy voucher to the value of £49 to all individuals that are part of the

council tax reduction scheme. Approximately 5975 will be eligible for the scheme. If 100% of vouchers are claimed this would total £292,775.

- 3.10 Provide £98 worth of energy vouchers to all families with children^[ws1] that are part of the council tax reduction scheme. The vouchers will be paid over a two month period (£49 per month). Approximately 1965 families with children will be eligible for the scheme. If 100% of vouchers are claimed this would total £192,570
- 3.11 All those eligible will be notified directly with details of how to claim their voucher. The voucher scheme is targeted at users with prepayment energy metres. Where an individual or family qualifies for the scheme, but does not have a prepayment meter, they will need to contact the council following receipt of their letter to make a claim.
- 3.12 The scheme will launch in late November / December 2021 to allow time for the set up of the contract with the energy vouchers provider.
- 3.13 The administration costs relating to the voucher scheme are still being negotiated, however are expected to be in the region of £3.60 per voucher claimed.
- 3.14 Total spend in Phase 1 will total approximately £901,345^[ws2] depending on final take up of the schemes outline above. Of which £608,570 will provide support to around 5200 families with children and a further 5975 other eligible individuals.
- 3.15 An options paper will be drafted for how the remaining fund will be allocated, depending on key priorities and other qualifying options which are simple to administer and quick to distribute.

4. APPEALS

- 4.1 Discretionary Support Schemes are not subject to any formal statutory appeals process and therefore there are no appeal rights.

5. FRAUD

- 5.1 The Council will not accept deliberate manipulation and fraud - and any resident caught falsifying their records to gain support will face prosecution and any payment issued will be subject to claw back, as will any payments paid in error.
- 5.2 One of the biggest risks for this scheme is impersonation fraud, where fraudsters work through a residential area and falsely claim under the names of eligible recipients. Risk has been reduced by a targeted scheme to eligible families.
- 5.3 The DWP advise that Authorities wishing to work with Third Party Organisations to deliver the scheme must carry out suitable due diligence checks to ensure they are viable and able to deliver the support. So, for example, ensuring all charities are registered and taking extra caution if they are new organisations.
- 5.4 Authorities are also encouraged to ensure checks are in place to verify the identity of those eligible.

6. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS

- 6.1 This proposal will contribute to the following key priority set out in the Council's Corporate Plan 2021 - 2022

Thriving Communities : by ensuring the most economically disadvantaged families and children receive Government funding to tackle the impacts of the pandemic.

7. ENVIRONMENTAL AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS

7.1 None to note.

8. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION

8.1 Communications appropriate to a targeted scheme will be sent to all those eligible to benefit from the scheme. Schools and out key VCS partners will also promote take up of the scheme and general communications will be provided on our website. There will be minimal social media promotion to mitigate any potential risks of fraudulent claims.

9. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

9.1 A full Equality Impact Assessment was completed for the original Decision Book report. There are no additional equalities impacts to note.

10. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

10.1 None to note.

11. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

11.1 The cost of these payments will be met by Central Government, the Household Support Scheme is ring-fenced.

11.2 To simplify the allocation of funding against the criteria outline by DWP, the Council has focused on circa 80% or more of the funding supporting eligible families and individuals with food and fuel. The remaining 20% of the fund will be spent during phase 2 of distribution of monies. This is currently being developed.

11.3 The Household Support Scheme funding allocation includes reasonable administration costs to enable Authorities to deliver the scheme. Authorities should deduct their estimated administration costs from the total allocation to determine the amount remaining. In all cases, Authorities should keep administrative costs to a reasonable level. Administration costs for each Authority will be published on www.gov.uk alongside detail of all spend related to this scheme.

12. BACKGROUND PAPERS

12.1 There are none.