



**Reading**  
Borough Council  
Working better with you

## DECISION BOOK

**Issue: 655      Date: 7 APRIL 2022**

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.

This issue of the decision book will be in public circulation up until **Sunday 17 April 2022**. During that period three Councillors may request in writing to the Assistant Director of Legal and Democratic Services that a decision should be referred either to a committee, or to the Council (as appropriate) for formal resolution.

The decision book is open to public inspection at the Civic Offices between 9.00 am and 5.00 pm, Mondays to Fridays and 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.

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## DECISION BOOK - ISSUE 655 - 7 APRIL 2022

### 1. HOUSEHOLD SUPPORT FUND PHASE 3

<u>DECISION</u>	<u>LEAD COUNCILLOR(S)</u>	<u>WARDS AFFECTED</u>	<u>PAGE NO.</u>
1. HOUSEHOLD SUPPORT FUND PHASE 3	COUNCILLORS BROCK AND PEARCE	BOROUGHWIDE	1

This report sets out the decision to use 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 3 of the Household Support Fund be allocated to support Reading residents with ongoing food costs as set out in section 4 of this report.**

**READING BOROUGH COUNCIL**  
**REPORT BY DEPUTY CHIEF EXECUTIVE**

<b>LEAD COUNCILLOR:</b>	<b>COUNCILLOR BROCK - LEADER OF THE COUNCIL</b> <b>COUNCILLOR PEARCE - LEAD COUNCILLOR FOR EDUCATION</b>		
<b>DATE:</b>	<b>7 APRIL 2022</b>		
<b>TITLE:</b>	<b>HOUSEHOLD SUPPORT FUND PHASE 3</b>		
<b>SERVICE:</b>	<b>CORPORATE IMPROVEMENT AND CUSTOMER SERVICES</b>	<b>WARDS:</b>	<b>BOROUGHWIDE</b>
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**1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- 1.1 This report sets out the decision to use 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 or committed to by 31 March 2022.
- 1.2 In the Governments Spring Statement, a further commitment was made to distribute another round of the Household Support Grant in 2022/23. The financial allocation to the Council has been confirmed as a further £1,130,648.94 (from 1 April 2022 to 30 September 2022).
- 1.3 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 time, there is a greater emphasis on supporting households with energy bills. Food and water bills also remain priorities. At least one third of the total funding must be spent on families with children and at least one third must be spent on pensioners
- 1.4 This provides proposals for the use of Phase 3 funding and bringing forward the 2022/23 allocation, as set out in section 4. Approximately £143,000 is yet to be allocated/is available from underspend on the 2021/22 scheme.

1.5 The following seven Decision Books have been completed relating to this funding:

- January (issue 620, dated 7 January 2021)
- March (issue 624, dated 12 March 2021)
- April (issue 631, dated 27 April 2021)
- June (issue 634, dated 17 June 2021)
- July (issue 637, dated 29 July 2021)
- October (issue 641, dated 19 October 2021)
- December (issue 646, dated 21 December 2021)

## **2.0 DECISION**

**2.1 It is the decision of the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Leader of the Council that Phase 3 of the Household Support Fund be allocated to support Reading residents with ongoing food costs as set out in section 4 of this report.**

## **3. BACKGROUND**

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

3.2 Following feedback from local authorities to the DWP the funding criteria has been revised to allow a broader range of vulnerable children, adults and families to benefit from the grant.

## **4. PHASE 3 PROPOSALS**

4.1 Approximately £143,000 of funding is likely to be available from the 2021/22 allocation. The exact total will be confirmed after 31 March once the energy voucher scheme has closed and any underspends have been calculated.

4.2 Grant proposals:

- Provide food vouchers (£20 per child per week) 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 two-week Easter Holiday (2022)

4.3 Approximately 6000 children will be eligible for the funding. If 100% of families take up the voucher scheme this would total £240,280. Based on previous schemes the take up is between 80-100% depending on the cohort of families receiving the voucher.

4.4 Additional funds from the recently announced extension to the Household Support Fund will be used to top up funding to the £240,280 required.

## **5. APPEALS**

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

## **6. FRAUD**

- 6.1 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.
- 6.2 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.
- 6.3 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.
- 6.4 Authorities are also encouraged to ensure checks are in place to verify the identity of those eligible.

## **7. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS**

- 7.1 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

## **8. ENVIRONMENTAL AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS**

- 8.1 None to note.

## **9. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION**

- 9.1 Communications appropriate to a targeted scheme will be sent to all those eligible to benefit from the scheme. Schools and our 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.

## **10. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

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

## **11. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 11.1 None to note.

## **12. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 12.1 The cost of these payments will be met by Central Government - the Household Support Scheme is ring-fenced funding.
- 12.2 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 energy. The remaining 20% of the fund has been allocated to fund housing arrears and other voluntary and community sector groups.

12.3 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](http://www.gov.uk) alongside detail of all spend related to this scheme.

12.4 The table below summarises the overall allocation/spend against the various aspects of the scheme.

Area of spend	Details	Original Allocation	Spend	Status
Food Voucher Scheme	£20p/w per child for 4 weeks based on 5,447 eligible children / individuals	£452,880	£405,370	All holidays complete
BFFC Admin	To co-ordinate Food Voucher Scheme, generate finance/MI returns	£5,000	£5,000	n/a
Energy Voucher Scheme	£49/household for 5,922 single households on CTRS  £98/household for 1,904 households on CTRS with a child/children  Discretionary Scheme - used to fund additional CTRS individual claimants (£24,500)	£505,582	Estimated: £433,000 (based on 85% take up and 100% take up of discretionary scheme)	Scheme closes 31 March 2022
Energy Voucher Scheme Top Up	Additional 126 vouchers for families on CTRS (£98/household)	n/a	£10,000 (based on 85% take up)	
RBC admin	To co-ordinate Energy Voucher Scheme and Phase 2/3 and generate finance/MI returns	£33,638	£33,638	n/a
VCS Grants (Phase 2)	Additional funds to support food, warmth, energy, and other essential living costs	£91,000	£91,000	Grants awarded
Housing Arrears (Phase 2)	Funds to support vulnerable residents with Housing Arrears	n/a	£10,000	
Food Vouchers (Phase 3)	£20p/w per child for 2 weeks (Easter) based on 6,007 eligible children / individuals	n/a	£142,641	
Total		£1,088,100	£1,130,649	
Funding available		£1,130,649	£1,130,649	
Funding remaining	Contingency	£42,549	£0	

**13. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

13.1 There are none.