



**Reading**  
Borough Council  
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## DECISION BOOK

**Issue: 658      Date: 18 MAY 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 **Saturday 28 May 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 658 - 18 MAY 2022

### 1. HOUSEHOLD SUPPORT FUND - EXTENSION

<u>DECISION</u>	<u>LEAD COUNCILLOR(S)</u>	<u>WARDS AFFECTED</u>	<u>PAGE NO.</u>
1. HOUSEHOLD SUPPORT FUND - EXTENSION	COUNCILLOR BROCK	BOROUGHWIDE	1

This report sets out the decision to use the latest round of Household Support Funding to support vulnerable families and individuals from 1 April 2022 to 30 September 2022.

It is the decision of the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Leader of the Council that the Household Support Fund extension funding will be allocated as follow:

- (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 £15 voucher per child) for the May half term (2022)
- (b) A targeted Energy 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 £49 voucher per family/care leaver)
- (c) A targeted Energy Voucher scheme for all people receiving the state pension who are on the Council Tax Reduction Scheme (CTRS) or in receipt of pension credit (1 x £98 voucher per individual)
- (d) Reading Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) organisations to support Reading residents with ongoing food, energy and living costs
- (e) Support for residents with Housing Arrears

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

<b>LEAD COUNCILLOR:</b>	<b>COUNCILLOR BROCK - LEADER OF THE COUNCIL</b>		
<b>DATE:</b>	<b>18 MAY 2022</b>		
<b>TITLE:</b>	<b>HOUSEHOLD SUPPORT FUND - EXTENSION</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 the latest round of Household Support Funding to support vulnerable families and individuals from 1 April 2022 to 30 September 2022. 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 30 September 2022.
- 1.2 In summary, the Grant Conditions are to provide support to households who would otherwise struggle to buy food or pay essential utility bills or meet other essential living costs or housing costs (in cases of genuine emergency) due to significantly rising living costs.
- 1.3 This funding round places a greater emphasis on supporting households with energy bills. Food and water bills also remain priorities. Additionally, at least one third of the total funding must be spent on families with children and at least one third must be spent on people receiving the state pension.
- 1.4 The previous Decision Book (issue 655) laid out arrangements for the Easter holidays. This report provides proposals for use of the funding as set out in section 4.
- 1.5 The following eight Decision Books have been completed relating to previous Household Support Funding:
  - January 2021 (issue 620, dated 7 January 2021)

- March 2021 (issue 624, dated 12 March 2021)
- April 2021 (issue 631, dated 27 April 2021)
- June 2021 (issue 634, dated 17 June 2021)
- July 2021 (issue 637, dated 29 July 2021)
- October 2021 (issue 641, dated 19 October 2021)
- December 2021 (issue 646, dated 21 December 2021)
- April 2022 (issue 655, dated 7 April 2022)

## **2.0 DECISION**

**2.1 It is the decision of the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Leader of the Council that the Household Support Fund extension funding 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 £15 voucher per child) for the May half term (2022<sup>[YJ1]</sup><sub>[RA2]</sub>)**
- b) A targeted Energy 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 £49 voucher per family/care leaver)**
- c) A targeted Energy Voucher scheme for all people receiving the state pension who are on the Council Tax Reduction Scheme<sup>[YJ3]</sup><sub>[RA4]</sub> (CTRS) or in receipt of pension credit (1 x £98 voucher per individual)**
- d) Reading voluntary and community sector (VCS) organisations to support Reading residents with ongoing food, energy and living costs**
- e) Support for residents with Housing Arrears**

## **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 eight decision books.
- 3.2** The DWP have revised the funding criteria for the latest funding round. At least one third of the total funding must be spent on families with children and at least one third must be spent on people receiving the state pension. In terms of type of support, the expectation is that the HSF extension should be used in a similar way as the original HSF scheme, although, with a greater emphasis on supporting households with energy bills. Food and water bills also remain priorities.

## **4. NEW HSF PROPOSALS**

### **FOOD**

- 4.1** Food Vouchers to be provided to approximately 6000 families with school age children eligible for Pupil Premium Free School Meals, vulnerable children up to nursery age and care leavers for:

- Remainder of Easter 2022 holiday not funded from previous HSF funding (1 x £20 voucher per child per week)
- May 2022 half term (1 x £15 voucher per child)

4.2 During the summer holidays 2022 families will be able to access food and activities provided by Brighter Futures for Children (BFfC) funded by the Holiday Activities Fund (HAF).

## **ENERGY**

4.3 Energy Vouchers will be provided to approximately 4,000 [families][YJ5][RA6] with school age children eligible for Pupil Premium Free School Meals / vulnerable children up to nursery age (1 x £49 voucher per family) and approximately 140 care leavers (1 x £49 voucher per care leaver).

4.4 Energy Vouchers (1 x £98 voucher per individual) will also be provided to approximately 4,300 people receiving the state pension (individuals who have reached the state pension age) who are on CTRS or who are in receipt of pension credit.

4.5 400 additional Energy Vouchers will be provided to residents (from the cohorts identified in 4.3 and 4.4 above) who have become eligible during the course of the funding period.

## **VCS GRANTS AND HOUSING ARREARS**

4.6 Additional grant support to be provided to local community organisations to support other vulnerable families/individuals with food as follows:

- Readifood (£8,000)
- Whitley Community Development Foundation (£8,000)
- Weller (£8,000)
- New Beginnings (£8,000)
- Wycliffe (£8,000)

4.7 Additional £150,000 grant support to be provided to Citizens Advice Reading [to][YJ7][RA8] support approximately 1,700 vulnerable individuals/families with energy vouchers and energy packs.

4.8 £10,000 to be provided to support residents with their Housing Arrears (Reading Council managed properties - Housing Revenue Account, Temporary accommodation, Homes for Reading, Rent Guarantee Scheme).

## **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/individuals.
- 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 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.

12.3 Reading Council will claim 5% admin costs to fund the administration of the scheme (including for Post Office Payout vouchers) and BfFC admin costs.

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 - Easter	Remainder of Easter not funded by previous HSF - £20 per child per week based on 6,007 eligible children / individuals	£83,173		Approved in Decision Book 655
Food Voucher Scheme - May HT	May Half Term - £15 per child per week based on 6,007 eligible children / care leavers	£90,105		
Energy Voucher Scheme - Families	1 x £49 voucher for 4,139 eligible families / care leavers	£209,622		
Energy Voucher Scheme - People receiving the state pension	1 x £98 voucher for 4,300 eligible people receiving the state pension	£421,400		
Energy Voucher Scheme - discretionary	Discretionary Scheme - used to fund families with school age children (Pupil Premium Free School Meals), vulnerable children up to nursery age and care leavers and people receiving the state pension on CTRS / pension credit who have become eligible during the course of the funding period	£29,400		
VCS Grants	Additional funds to support food, energy and other essential living costs	£190,000		
Housing Arrears	Funds to support residents with Housing Arrears	£10,000		
Admin	To co-ordinate Food and Energy Voucher schemes, generate finance/MI returns, pay Post Office Payout admin costs	£56,500		
Total		£1,090,200	£0	
Funding available		£1,130,649	£1,130,649	

Funding remaining	Contingency	£40,449	£1,130,649	
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**13. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

13.1 There are none.