



**Reading**  
Borough Council  
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## DECISION BOOK

**Issue: 663      Date: 18 OCTOBER 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 **Friday 28 October 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.

<b>Contact:</b>	<b>Richard Woodford</b>	<b>Committee Services</b>
<b>Tel:</b>		<b>0118 937 2332</b>
<b>e-mail:</b>		<a href="mailto:richard.woodford@reading.gov.uk">richard.woodford@reading.gov.uk</a>

## DECISION BOOK - ISSUE 663 - 18 OCTOBER 2022

### 1. HOUSEHOLD SUPPORT FUND (HSF3)

<u>DECISION</u>	<u>LEAD COUNCILLOR(S)</u>	<u>WARDS AFFECTED</u>	<u>PAGE NO.</u>
1. HOUSEHOLD SUPPORT FUND (HSF3)	COUNCILLOR BROCK	BOROUGHWIDE	1

This report sets out the decision to use the latest round of Household Support Funding (known as HSF3) to support vulnerable families and individuals from 1 October 2022 to 31 March 2023. The funding amount allocated to the Council by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) is £1,130,648.94. The fund must be spent or committed by 31 March 2023.

**It is the decision of the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Leader of the Council that the Household Support Fund (HSF3) will be allocated as follows:**

- (a) A targeted Cost of Living Voucher Scheme for families and care leavers (1 x £125 voucher per family household/care leaver) and older people (1 x £100 voucher per household)**
- (b) A Cost of Living payment for Reading households in receipt of Housing Benefit (but no other DWP benefit) of £650 - in line with DWP guidance**

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT BY INTERIM EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF RESOURCES

<b>LEAD COUNCILLOR:</b>	<b>COUNCILLOR BROCK - LEADER OF THE COUNCIL</b>		
<b>DATE:</b>	<b>18 OCTOBER 2022</b>		
<b>TITLE:</b>	<b>HOUSEHOLD SUPPORT FUND (HSF3)</b>		
<b>SERVICE:</b>	<b>CORPORATE IMPROVEMENT AND CUSTOMER SERVICES</b>	<b>WARDS:</b>	<b>BOROUGHWIDE</b>
<b>AUTHOR:</b>	<b>ISABEL EDGAR</b>	<b>TEL:</b>	<b>07923 272292</b>
<b>JOB TITLE:</b>	<b>ASSISTANT DIRECTOR FOR CORPORATE IMPROVEMENT AND CUSTOMER SERVICES</b>	<b>E-MAIL:</b>	<b><a href="mailto:isabel.edgar@reading.gov.uk">isabel.edgar@reading.gov.uk</a></b>

**1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- 1.1 This report sets out the decision to use the latest round of Household Support Funding (known as HSF3) to support vulnerable families and individuals from 1 October 2022 to 31 March 2023. The funding amount allocated to the Council by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) is £1,130,648.94. The fund must be spent or committed by 31 March 2023.
- 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 continues to place an emphasis on supporting households with energy costs. Food and water bills also remain priorities. The DWP have removed some of the restrictive ring-fencing criteria for this funding round, following feedback from Local Authorities. Previous rounds of funding required the Council to allocate at least one third of funding to families with children and at least one third to people receiving the state pension. These cohorts remain priority community groups for the Council, however the removal of the ring fence gives the council more flexibility around allocations.
- 1.4 The following ten 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)
- May 2022 (issue 658, dated 18 May 2022)
- October 2022 (issue 662, dated 13 October 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 (HSF3) will be allocated as follows:**

- (a) A targeted Cost of Living Voucher Scheme for families and care leavers (1 x £125 voucher per family household/care leaver) and older people (1 x £100 voucher per household)**
- (b) A Cost of Living payment for Reading households in receipt of Housing Benefit (but no other DWP benefit) of £650 - in line with DWP guidance**

## **3. BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 The DWP (Department of Work and Pensions) have over the past two years provided several rounds of grant funding related to provision of food and energy support. The details of these can be found in the previous ten decision books.
- 3.2 The DWP have revised the funding criteria for the latest funding round. The ringfence that required at least one third of the total funding to be spent on families with children and at least one third to be spent on people receiving the state pension has been removed. The expectation of the DWP is that HSF3 continues to be used in a similar way as the previous HSF scheme - putting a greater emphasis on supporting households with energy bills. Food and water bills also remain priorities.

## **4. HSF3 PROPOSALS**

- 4.1 The following proposal recommends allocation of £100 to older people households and £125 to family households and care leavers. The rationale for the decision to allocate £25 extra to families is to cover additional food and energy costs associated with a larger household. The new Cost of Living vouchers are primarily to support people with energy and food costs.
- 4.2 Consultation across services and directorates has taken place in order to identify key priorities for the funding (within the parameters of the grant conditions) that are simple to administer and quick to distribute.
- 4.3 Cost of Living Vouchers will be provided to approximately 3,800 (3,829 at the end of September 2022) families and young people, broken down as follows:

- 1 x £125 voucher per family household that have school age children eligible for Pupil Premium Free School Meals and/or vulnerable children up to nursery age
  - 1 x £125 voucher per care leaver.
- 4.4 Cost of Living Vouchers (1 x £100 voucher per household) will be provided to approximately 4,200 (4,220 at the end of September 2022) older people, broken down as follows:
- 3698 older people receiving the state pension (individuals who have reached the state pension age) who are on the Council Tax Reduction Scheme (CTRS) or in receipt of housing benefit
  - 522 older people receiving the state pension (individuals who have reached the state pension age) who are in receipt of pension credit or savings credit and not on CTRS.
- 4.5 Residents living in care homes have not been included in the calculations. The rationale for this is that their energy costs (and majority if not all food costs) are paid for by their care home.
- 4.6 In addition to the vouchers listed above, approximately 350 households (355 at the end of September 2022) receiving Housing Benefit and on CTRS **but no other DWP benefit** will be provided with a £650 Cost of Living voucher. This cohort of residents were unable to access the DWP cost of living payment of £650 and subsequently Council's were directed by DWP to include them in their allocations for HSF3. This will bring these residents up to the same level of support provided to other residents via DWP.
- 4.7 A small fund of £1,250 has been allocated to provided 50 x £25 emergency energy vouchers to council tenants who experience issues with their heating and hot water to fund the use of electric heaters whilst the issues are resolved.
- 4.8 The budget laid out in section 12 assumes a take up / redemption rate of 90% for all groups identified. Average take up / redemption rates for previous HSF funding have been 80-90%.
- 4.9 Unlike previous HSF grants there is no allocation to food banks or other voluntary organisations. This is because, in line with Decision Book 662 (13 October 2022) for HSF2 underspend, key organisations have already received additional funding to provide support through winter 2022.
- 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).

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
Cost of Living Voucher Scheme - families	£125 per family household / care leaver for 3,829 eligible family households / individuals. Budget calculated based on 90% take up	£430,762		
Cost of Living Voucher Scheme - older people	£100 per older person household for 4,220 eligible households. Budget calculated based on 90% take up	£379,800		
Cost of Living Voucher Scheme - Housing Benefit	£650 per household for 355 eligible households. Budget calculated based on 90% take up	£207,675		
Emergency energy voucher - housing repairs	£25 vouchers available for emergency energy costs for those affected by lack of heating / hot water	£1,250		
Admin	To co-ordinate voucher schemes, generate finance/MI returns, pay Post Office Payout admin costs	£56,500		
Total		£1,075,988	£0	
Funding available		£1,130,649	£1,130,649	
Funding remaining	Contingency	£54,661	£1,130,649	

### 13. BACKGROUND PAPERS

13.1 There are none.