

# OFFICER DECISION NOTICE



**Reading**  
Borough Council  
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This notice is to be used for the following types of officer decisions. (Select one option).

**A.** Decisions taken by officers under a specific express delegation from Council or a Committee.

**B.** Decisions taken by officers under a general delegation from Council or a Committee, which relates to (i) a permission or a licence, or (ii) the rights of an individual, or (iii) a contract or expenditure over £100,000.

<b>1. Title of decision:</b>	Household Support Fund 5
<b>2. Date of the decision:</b>	19 April 2024
<b>3. The decision maker:</b>	Charlie Stewart, Executive Director of Resources

#### 4. Decision details:

It is the decision of the Executive Director of Resources, in consultation with the Leader of the Council, that the £1,130,648.94 Household Support Fund 5 (HSF5) allocation to Reading from the Department for Work & Pensions be utilised in a manner consistent with the allocation decision taken by Policy Committee in July 2023 for the Household Support Fund 4 allocation.

This decision is taken under the delegation approved for the HSF4 grant at the Policy Committee as the HSF5 grant is defined by DWP as an extension of the HSF4.

Specifically, this includes the following Cost of Living support:

- Vouchers for Pupil Premium Free School Meal households
- Vouchers for Care Leavers
- Funding to local VCS organisations directed by Public Health
- An application element focused on local priority residents

As with the previous Household Support Fund scheme, up to 10% of the funding will be available for contingency and administration costs.

#### 5. Reasons for the decision:

During 2023/24, the Household Support Fund 4 scheme in Reading has provided the following support to residents:

- Approx. 3,300 households with Pupil Premium Free School Meal children, and approx. 200 Care Leavers have received Cost of Living vouchers worth £365.
- 890 households with residents above state pension age in receipt of Housing Benefit who did not receive the direct government support provided to recipients of other DWP benefits, received a payment of £450.

- 2,700 payments of £125 have been made to low-income residents who have applied for cost-of-living support. Of these, 1,272 applications were made from residents with a disability, and 1,969 were made with households with children.
- £20,000 has been provided to enable VCS organisations to provide direct support to low-income families.

The delivery of the Household Support Fund 4 scheme has been an effective way to utilise the funding within the borough to provide direct financial support to residents that they have the flexibility to utilise in the best way to meet their needs.

Continuing this approach for the next six months, using the additional grant provided by Government, will enable a consistent and familiar approach to supporting residents struggling with the current cost of living pressures.

The guidance from DWP states that informally this Household Support Fund allocation is considered an extension to the previous four Household Support Fund schemes. However, any underspends from the previous scheme cannot be carried forward.

In 2023/24, the Council's HSF scheme included an element for residents above state pension age in receipt of Housing Benefit but who were not eligible for the Government's direct cost of living support. This was intended to mitigate the exclusion of circa 900 residents from the national support.

The Government is not providing direct financial cost of living support to residents as it did in 2023/24. The local Household Support Fund 5 allocation is not sufficient to mitigate the total financial loss of the national support to all residents. These residents will be eligible to apply for the application-based element, and residents above state pension age will be added to the priority groups for support.

Guidance for the next round of the Household Support Fund (HSF) was issued on 26<sup>th</sup> March 2024 and confirmed that Reading Borough Council will receive £1,130,648.94 to deliver activities between 1<sup>st</sup> April and 30<sup>th</sup> September 2024.

The objective of the fund is to provide crisis support to vulnerable households in most need with the cost of essentials. The fund should help those who are struggling to afford household essentials including energy and water bills, food, and wider essentials. Funding can support households with housing costs where existing housing support does not meet this need and can supplement support with signposting and advice. The proposed use of the funding meets these objectives, although the Council continues to seek to support residents before they are in crisis.

The guidance retains the requirement to enable residents to apply for cost-of-living support when needed. This requirement is met by the proposed application-based element within this decision.

The funding allocation also includes the use of reasonable administrative costs incurred administering the scheme. The Council will continue to seek to minimise the administrative costs, as it did in 2023/24, to maximise the funding available to support residents.

There is a mandatory requirement for all publicity material to reference that the funding is provided by the UK Government. This was met under HSF4 and will be applied to all spending under the HSF extension.

**6. Alternative options considered (if any) and rejected:**

Alternative allocations of the grant were considered however they were rejected as the allocations used for the HSF4 grant have found to be effective and it is important to quickly commence the delivery of the grant, which would be delayed significantly if alternative options had to be presented to Policy Committee.

**7. List of open Background Papers:**

Policy Committee 10<sup>th</sup> July 2023 – Household Support Fund 4

**8. List of confidential or exempt Background Papers:**

None

**9. Any other matters taken into consideration:**

<input type="checkbox"/> Legitimate expectation of consultation	<input type="checkbox"/> Procedural requirements
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Public Health implications	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Environmental or Climate Change
<input type="checkbox"/> Health and Safety	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Risk Management implications
<input type="checkbox"/> Transparency of Information (FOI etc)	<input type="checkbox"/> Privacy Impact Assessments
<input type="checkbox"/> Human Rights Act Duties	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Equality Impact Assessment
<input type="checkbox"/> Corporate Parenting	<input type="checkbox"/> Community Safety
<input type="checkbox"/> Regulatory duties	<input type="checkbox"/> EU withdrawal
<input type="checkbox"/> Armed Forces Covenant	<input type="checkbox"/> Other

**Details of the matters taken into account:**

**ENVIRONMENTAL AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS**

Resources from the Household Support Fund can be utilised by residents to improve the energy efficiency of their homes and therefore reduce their energy costs.

**COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION**

The Council has routinely engaged with local voluntary and community organisations to understand the impact they are experiencing in supporting residents with the rising cost of living within the borough. This engagement has enabled the Council to tailor the information and support available to residents who are struggling with the rising cost of living.

The development of the approach and criteria for the application-based element of the Household Support Fund have been guided by the feedback from local voluntary and community organisations on how the rising cost of living can affect residents from a broad range of backgrounds and personal circumstances. For example, over half of the residents being referred to support from the ReadiFood foodbank are single people living alone.

#### EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

A full Equality Impact Assessment has been completed for the entire utilisation of the HSF4 grant from DWP. There are no additional equalities impacts to note. The Household Support Fund is focused on supporting any resident who is experiencing difficulties with the rising cost of living within the borough. Opportunities to access support from the Household Support fund have been widely promoted across the borough to ensure everyone is aware of them, including to local voluntary and community organisations who have a direct relationship with local communities across the borough. Elements of the Household Support Fund which are targeted towards families eligible for free school meals are also expected to support other protected characteristics within the borough.

#### 10. Legal considerations

None to note.

#### 11. Financial considerations

The delegated decision utilises £1,130,648.94 HSF5 grant provided to the Council. There is no impact on the Council's revenue budget.

#### 12. Internal consultations

Details of the HSF5 proposals have been discussed with the Council's Corporate Management Team.

Sections 13- 18: To be completed only for Decision A (express delegation from a Committee)

<b>13. The name of the Committee:</b>	Policy Committee
<b>14. Date of the meeting:</b>	10 July 2023
<b>15. Minute number:</b>	2023/24 Minute 13
<b>16. The delegation given by the Committee:</b>	That the Executive Director of Resources, in consultation with the Leader of the Council, be authorised to make changes to the delivery of HSF4 to meet changes in demand and maintain compliance with the funding allocation requirements from DWP.
<b>17. The name of any member of the committee who declared a conflict of interest in relation to the decision:</b>	None
<b>18. Any councillor or officer required to be consulted prior to the exercise of this delegation and details of their response.</b>	Leader of the Council