

**Bracknell Forest Council
Record of Decision**

Work Programme Reference	I120639
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1. **TITLE:** Household Support Fund and Financial Hardship Action Plan

2. **SERVICE AREA:** Communities and Policy

3. **PURPOSE OF DECISION**

To seek approval of the process to distribute additional grant funding received as part of the Household Support Fund. To update on the final outcomes of the Financial Hardship Action Plan.

4 **IS KEY DECISION** Yes

5. **DECISION MADE BY:** Executive

6. **DECISION:**

- i. the Household Support Fund (phase five) be distributed through:
 - a) Purchasing supermarket vouchers, or for opted schools to make equivalent arrangements, for children qualifying for Free School Meals in Bracknell Forest primary and secondary schools. Households will receive a £15 voucher per child per week of the holidays.
 - b) Enhancing the Local Welfare Scheme provision, to expand the support available via applications from households in need of emergency help, where assistance cannot be accessed elsewhere.
 - c) The provision of application-based grants to voluntary, community, and faith sector organisations to build capacity and extend the reach of support to residents.
 - d) Extending the incentivised debt support offer, where identified at-risk households with a housing benefit overpayment, or council tax arrears, are offered up to £1,000 to reduce their debt alongside attending a debt management session.
 - e) Additional discretionary payment to reduce the Council Tax liability to £0 for six months for those that receive 80% reduction in Council Tax due to being on the highest rate of disability benefit.
 - f) Should any funding remain unspent toward the end of the grant period, supermarket vouchers may be provided to properties identified in fuel poverty, particularly those who are in receipt of disability and/or carer benefits and/or EPC below E.
- ii. note the outcomes of the financial hardship action plan and the longer-term support available through business-as-usual services

7. REASON FOR DECISION

1. The Household Support Fund (HSF) is provided by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), but local authorities must determine how it is spent within the scope of the guidance issued. The local authority is required by the DWP to create a local eligibility framework to disburse the funding.
2. Recommendations have been established based on learning from how the previous phases of the funding have used and continued assessment of local need.

8. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

The Financial Hardship Officers' Group and Members Welfare Advisory Panel have considered a range of options for spending the HSF. It was concluded that the other options would not be as effective as those recommended in terms of efficiently disbursing funds to those most in need, whilst keeping within the guidelines set out by DWP. The proposals follow the previously agreed mechanism in distributing preceding tranches of funding, accounting for the learning from these.

9. **DOCUMENT CONSIDERED:** Report of the Assistant Director: Chief Executive's Officer

10. **DECLARED CONFLICTS OF INTEREST:** None

Date Decision Made	Final Day of Call-in Period
23 April 2024	1 May 2024