

**Bracknell Forest Council
Record of Decision**

Work Programme Reference	I109392
---------------------------------	----------------

1. **TITLE:** Financial Hardship Action Plan and Household Support Fund (Phase 3) distribution

2. **SERVICE AREA:** Chief Executive's Office

3. **PURPOSE OF DECISION**

To seek approval on the distribution plans for the third phase of the Household Support Fund grant, provided by the Department for Work and Pensions. To brief the Executive on the operational action plan for reducing the longer term impact of financial hardship for residents.

4 **IS KEY DECISION** Yes

5. **DECISION MADE BY:** Executive

6. **DECISION:**

- i. the distribution of the Household Support Fund (Phase three) through the following routes be approved.
 - a. Supermarket vouchers to Free School Meal pupils at Bracknell Forest schools, ages 5-16.
 - b. Offering the local foodbanks additional funding, including to provide fuel vouchers and fresh food.
 - c. Purchase supermarket vouchers to distribute to low-income households receiving income based council tax reduction or housing benefit but not the benefits, such as universal credit, which would qualify them for the £650 national cost of living payment.
 - d. Enhancing the Local Welfare Scheme provision, allowing applications from households in hardship who would not otherwise automatically qualify for support.
- ii. the financial hardship action plan (2022-2024) for operational implementation is endorsed.

7. **REASON FOR DECISION**

1. There is increasing financial hardship in the community, and nationally, related to rising inflation and the cost of living crisis. This has extended the financial uncertainty many households faced during the pandemic. The financial hardship action plan offers a preventative approach to hardship, drawing together existing support across the voluntary, community and faith sector and council to maximise resources. This aims to help residents be more financially independent and the community more resilient.

2. Residents are likely to be concerned about their finances and Councillors may be asked what support is available, the action plan aims to help answer these questions.
3. The commitments within the action plan will be delivered over the next 18 months, however the council recognises that there is also immediate hardship facing many households in the borough. Therefore, the additional funding provided within the Household Support Fund is welcomed short term support. The recommendations on distributing this funding are set out to enable the funding to be distributed to as many households as possible through mechanisms available between now and March 2023.

8. **ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

1. The relevant Officer and Councillor groups considered other options for spending the Household Support Fund, but it was concluded that these would not be as effective as those recommended for supporting those most in need. The proposals broadly follow the previously agreed mechanism in distributing preceding tranches of funding. Discussions with other councils also show that many are also choosing to fund supermarket vouchers and boosting existing support mechanisms such as welfare funds or voluntary and community sector partners.
2. There is no statutory requirement to deliver a financial hardship action plan, and there are limited additional resources available to do this, so the plan makes best use of existing resources. The Executive could decide not to endorse the delivery of the action plan, or any further development. However, given the current economic climate, without any action there is likely to be increasing pressure on household finances and on demand for services such as welfare, housing, social care and council tax in the near future.

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
18 October 2022	25 October 2022