

RUNNYMEDE BOROUGH COUNCIL**CONSULTATION WITH APPROPRIATE CHAIRMAN AND VICE- CHAIRMAN FOR URGENT ACTION TO BE TAKEN UNDER STANDING ORDER 42**

TO: Councillors
Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Corporate Management Committee

FROM: Linda Norman

OFFICER REFERENCE: Housing Support Fund DATE: 6th July 2022

1.	<p>Synopsis of report:</p> <p>To create and implement a Household Support fund to support the Borough's most vulnerable residents during the current cost of living crisis within the guidance laid down by central government.</p>
2.	<p>Reasons why this matter cannot wait for a Committee Decision. (Please state if agreement of Chairman and Vice-Chairman required within 24 hours, and why)</p> <p>The new scheme was launched in April 2022 and funding was allocated to first tier authorities. In May 2022, Surrey CC set out the conditions required to administer the Housing Support Fund and advised Runnymede that it had been allocated £197,170 under the scheme, with a third of the monies being ring-fenced for additional support for pensioners. The scheme is intended to run from April 22 through to September 22 to distribute the monies as quickly as possible to those most in need. It is therefore important to create this local policy to support our vulnerable residents and ensure they are not adversely affected whilst the Council goes through the democratic process of approving this policy. With such a limited time frame to deliver this scheme and the first government return due in July on monies paid, the Government are expecting Local Authorities to act quickly on this matter.</p>
3.	<p>Recommendation(s)</p> <p>To approve Runnymede's Housing Support Fund policy and for officers to start administering the scheme as quickly as possible, working with partner organisations to facilitate an efficient and effective process.</p>

4. Context of report

In response to the cost-of-living crisis, the Government has made £421m available to Councils to support those most in need to help with significantly rising living costs. This funding covers the period 01 April 2022 to 30 September 2022 inclusive. Local Authorities have discretion on exactly how this funding is used within the guidance set out by Central Government.

The expectation is that it should primarily be used to support households in the most need particularly those including children and pensioners who would otherwise struggle with energy bills, food and water bills. Energy bills may be of particular concern to low-income households during the period of the scheme and Local Authorities should especially consider how they can support households with the cost of energy. It can also be used to support households with essential costs related to those items and with wider essential costs. In exceptional cases of genuine emergency, it can additionally be used to support housing costs where existing housing support schemes do not meet this exceptional need.

Authorities should develop a 'local eligibility framework and approach' to enable them to distribute grant funding that best supports households most in need. At least one third of the funding is for vulnerable households with children) and another third of the funding is for pensioners. The remainder of the funding (up to one third) can be available for other vulnerable households (without children or pensioners including individuals) or for additional spend on the named groups.

The Government expect Councils to create local policies so that support for vulnerable households can be provided as soon as is practically possible. Councils should work collaboratively with other organisations in their area who may encounter those households who are eligible and would benefit from this grant.

The expectation is that it should primarily be used to support households in the most need particularly those including children and pensioners who would otherwise struggle with energy bills, food, and water bills. Therefore, 1/3 of the total Household Support Fund allocation provided to Surrey County Council is to be ring-fenced and targeted at residents of pensionable age in receipt of Council Tax Support. Runnymede's allocation for this element is £130,538.

The remaining £66,632 of the allocation to Runnymede is at the discretion of the council on how to identify and support those in most need.

5. Report and, where applicable, options considered

Vulnerable households across Runnymede will be able to access the support fund to help them with essentials over the coming months as the country continues its recovery from the pandemic. Payment is made under Section 31 Local Government Finance Act 2003. Runnymede Borough Council has been allocated £66,632 to support families who have been adversely impacted.

Powers have also been granted under the Localism Act 2011, which allow Runnymede to set up a local scheme for the granting of discretionary relief where such relief would be of benefit to the local community.

The Government is asking local authorities to prioritise support for local communities:

- The objective of the Household Support Fund is to provide support to vulnerable households in most need of support to help with significantly rising living costs.
- To use their discretion on how to identify and support those in most need
- To use the funding to meet immediate need preferably within 12 weeks of funding allocation being distributed
- Help those who are struggling to afford food, energy and water bills and other essential expenditure during the winter as the country recovers following the pandemic

This grant is primarily aimed at:

- Residents who are in the most need of support to pay for food, energy, and water bills, and in emergencies, other household costs and expenditure
- Those who are without sufficient resources to meet the immediate short-term needs of themselves or dependents during the period 1st April 2022 to 30th September 2022, or sooner if the fund has run out
- Alleviating food and fuel poverty where gas, electric, water or food bills have risen
- Safeguarding families in their own homes

Eligibility will be for those residents whose liability for Council Tax is because their sole or main residence during the period 1st April 2022 to 30th September 2022 is within the Runnymede Borough Council area and have less than £6,000 in savings. Applicants in council tax bands F, G or H who are excluded from council tax support and in receipt of a means tested Benefit will be able to claim £150 towards energy bills.

All other eligibility will be assessed on need by our trusted partner organisations, Citizens Advice, Adult Social Care Team, and Runnymede Borough Council Housing Team. Eligibility is assessed as per household, considering household composition

Ukrainian guests will be able to claim help with essentials linked to energy and water, travel expenses and wider essentials where they and/or their household are unable to pay buy essential items, pay for travel, clothing, or mobile phone bills.

The Council has a duty to carefully consider every application on its individual merits, considering the relevant circumstances affecting each resident.

The Council and its trusted partners will assess the need and complete a nomination application form.





The Council will publicise the scheme through the Council's website, social media and through posters distributed by ward councillors.

Residents will be required to make an application with supporting documentary evidence either to the Council or a trusted partner organisation by 30 September 2022, or sooner if the fund has run out. If the resident is unable to meet any of the criteria, they should clearly explain why.

The level of relief awarded will be capped at £800.00 per household to ensure as many people as possible are supported.

6. Policy framework implications

- This policy underpins the Council's Corporate Theme of 'Supporting Local People'
- This policy underpins the Council's commitment to supporting the Government's Cost of Living crisis initiative

7.	Financial and Resource implications (where practicable)
	<p>Resource implications of suggested course of action: -</p> <p>The Council has received ring-fenced funding of £197,170 to deliver this scheme</p>
8.	Legal implications
	<p>Powers have granted under Section 1 of the Localism Act 2011 and payment is covered by Section 31 Local Government Finance Act 2003.</p>
9.	Equality implications
	<p>By creating a local policy to support our vulnerable residents with the current cost of living crisis will have a positive impact on any resident with protected characteristics</p>
10.	Other implications
	<p>There are no environmental, biodiversity or sustainability implications of this report.</p>
11.	Background papers
	<p>Housing Support Fund policy</p>
12.	<u>Chief Officer(s) Decision</u>
	<p>Signature of authorised officer </p> <p>I have been consulted and am in agreement with the above</p> <p>Signature(s) and position(s) of other relevant Chief Officer, Corporate Heads or authorised representatives</p> <p></p> <p> Assistant Chief Executive or his authorised representative where the decision involves expenditure, loss of income, or future implications for budget or financial forecast.</p>
13.	<u>Chief Executive's Decision</u>
	<p>Signature of Chief Executive </p> <p>I have been consulted and am in agreement with the above</p>

14. Chairman and Vice-Chairman Comments

I concur in the Chief Officer's decision

Signed _____

Date _____

Signed _____

Date _____

I have the following further comments:

Further information may be obtained from _____ on Ext. _____

The completed copy is to be returned by the Councillors to the Corporate Head of Law and Governance (Democratic Services) who will send a copy to the Chief Officer and report to the relevant Committee for information.