

## How London borough children's services are supporting families through the cost of living crisis (Dec 2022)

### Introduction

London Councils and LIA put a call for evidence out to all London Boroughs in November 2022. The information shared has been set out in this report and provides a snapshot of some of the work currently being undertaken across London to support families living in poverty this winter.

The three sections in this briefing cover food poverty, additional support to families, and support to foster carers / Care Leavers / UASC .

### 1. Tackling food poverty – how are you using government grants to finance food vouchers and activities during the school holidays? Are you doing anything additional to this to alleviate food poverty over the winter?

#### Barnet

In Family services we have ensured that we work closely with our Early Years settings, Children's Centres (CCs) and schools to identify Households with children who would be eligible for support via the Household Support Fund and work with schools and our partners in the VCS sector through Young Barnet Foundation to engage as many eligible children as possible in our BACE (HAF programme) [www.barnetyouth.org](http://www.barnetyouth.org). In addition to this Family Services are engaged with the Food Steering Group (led by public health) who are developing the Barnet Food Plan 2022-2027 which includes a preventative approach to food insecurity and an action plan, we have been part of Cost of Living Workshops to develop the content for the Cost of Living page on the councils website <https://www.barnet.gov.uk/benefits-grants-and-financial-advice/cost-living-support>. The council are publicising support available across all comms at the moment as part of a council wide Cost of Living campaign, to ensure our families, children and care leaver's have the right support and know where to go for help.

During school holidays we run BACE activities for children in reception -11 years old for families in receipt of free school meals.

#### Croydon

Currently we have approximately £2k set aside per locality (£6k) which was held back from the Housing Support Fund. We use this money (which we have turned into food vouchers) for families in need. We expect that we will use a batch of this money over the coming Christmas period for those families who will be impacted by large fuel costs, which may reduce funds they usually spend on food.

#### Greenwich

In Greenwich our approach to using HSG has incorporated a mixture of targeted payments (including FSM pupils during school holidays) plus funding other initiatives. In relation to targeted payments we have worked with the Post Office in order to make cash payments rather than finance food vouchers. This enables families to spend on both food and utilities in line with the grant aspiration and for families to focus spend on where they're feeling the biggest pressure.

In addition we have planned to allocate funding to:

- Greenwich's Emergency Support Scheme which enables discretionary support for local residents during challenging periods.
- Greenwich's Stay Warm Stay Safe programme delivered through our Community Hub and provides support to those vulnerable / at risk from the cold weather. This also links to dedicated support around accessing help with utility bills and areas such as benefits, insulation, fire safety visits etc.
- Greenwich Co-operative Development Agency to fund provision of food for local Food Pantries and the Food Bank.
- The delivery of a small grants programme, which is targeted at funding local organisations who are in contact with vulnerable households and can support them with food and any other items to help during the period e.g. warm clothes. This grant scheme helps to reach those families who may have less contact with statutory services or larger organisations.

### **Hammersmith & Fulham**

As well as utilising household Support Funding to support the delivery of holiday activity (HAF) and FSM vouchers, Hammersmith and Fulham has been implementing a programme to address school food poverty since the end of 2019.

UFSM secondary school pilot - Since January 2020 the council has supported UFSM at two secondary schools. Although disrupted by COVID lockdowns, this pilot has also been evaluated by independent researchers finding that it had a significant impact meeting with coherent goals of increased access to a healthy meal, reduced food insecurity and better nutrition.

Universal Primary school Breakfasts - The council, in partnership with national charity Magic Breakfast, has extended an offer of free breakfasts to all its primary schools and nurseries, without any eligibility criteria for the school or pupils. Breakfasts are provided at the start of the school day and this was extended during the pandemic lockdowns and holidays to include home deliveries. In the last year alone the council has provided 600,000 breakfasts through this offer.

Additional support - Over Christmas we will be providing take home recipe packs with food and activities as part of our HAF programme.

### **Lewisham**

Since summer holiday 2020, Lewisham schools and settings have distributed shopping vouchers (or hampers in some cases) to families whose children are eligible for FSM during every school holiday. This currently provides £15 per eligible child per week. This was funded by the Department for Education during lockdown school closures and later through the Council allocating funding via the government's 2020 Winter Grant scheme and lately the Household Support Fund and its extensions.

### **Tower Hamlets**

Holiday Activities and Food programme - School-age children who receive benefits-related free school meals, as well as a number of other vulnerable children identified by schools are able to access free healthy food during the Easter, Summer and Christmas holidays, alongside nutritional education, enriching and physical activities, food education for family and carers, and signposting and referrals to support services.

School uniform grants are available for parents or carers who are on a low-income or receiving some form of benefits or receiving support from NASS (National Asylum Support Service).

## **Waltham Forest**

Here is a summary of what is being done to support families with children through the Household Support Fund (Oct 22 – Mar 23):

- Breakfast clubs in primary schools – funding to primary schools to enable them to identify and support those children who, due to cost of living crisis, arrive to school hungry.
- Free School Meals during school holidays – supermarket vouchers issued to children on the FSM register during the October half term, Christmas and February half term school holidays.
- Voucher awards to families with children that are currently working with Early Help, Children’s Social Care, SEND and Care Leavers service teams to support with food and essentials linked to energy & water bills. Direct award payments made to those known to Young Carers service to support with food and energy costs.
- Discretionary fund for schools to distribute directly to vulnerable families in support of food and wider essentials.
- Warm coat / school uniform fund through Revenues and & Benefits service aimed directly at families with children.
- Community Kitchens in partnership with local VCS organisations to host activities where people can come together to eat a warm meal in a communal and welcoming setting.
- Food Bank support: wholesale food purchase for distribution to local foodbanks via food parcels.

## **Lambeth**

This winter, Lambeth Council will be providing targeted payments to residents identified as being most in need, including an additional payment to those most in need AND a single parent.

Families with young children (under 5) and pregnant people can access food vouchers at a variety of child centres in the borough and residents can also access these vouchers on prescription, based on medical need.

The council has also provided additional capacity to at-scale food distribution in the borough. A full list of the borough’s food provision can be found on the Lambeth Larder website:  
<https://www.lambethlarder.org/>

## **2. Additional support - what other additional measures are being considered by your borough to support families over the forthcoming school holidays e.g. warm banks?**

### **Barnet**

We work with Public Health colleagues to promote Healthy Start vouchers. If a woman is more than 10 weeks pregnant or has a child under four, they may be entitled to get help to buy healthy food and milk. If eligible, they’ll be sent a Healthy Start card with money on it that they can use in some UK shops. This card will also enable the user to access Healthy Start vitamins.

We are also working with Public Health colleagues to work with schools and settings on Healthy Early Years and supporting Healthy Food Options in schools – linking to our BACE (HAF) programme.

Our Early Years and Primary Lead also ensures circulation to partners of any support sites/links and information such as the below

- The team at Good Thinking have put together a new cost of living article to give you some practical tips and links to support organisations.
- The GLA's Help With the Cost of Living online hub continues to be updated with a range of information to support Londoners, including on money and mental health.

### **Brent**

The council is currently identifying warm spaces that could be made available for families to access – mainly out of local libraries. Details also attached of general cost of living support being provided to local residents: <https://www.brent.gov.uk/costofliving>

Support is available to Brent residents through the Resident Support Fund which can help provide emergency financial support towards energy bills for eligible residents.

### **City**

We are developing a proposal to establish a food pantry/club outlet in the City – but that remains subject to funding and if supported will not be in place before the new year

### **Greenwich**

A summary on some of the additional measures to support families include:

- Upgrading the funding for school clothing grants and making a one off winter school clothing top-up payment to those in receipt of FSM.
- Funding to support the establishment of warm spaces across a range of community sites. This will include Children's Centres who are setting up 'Front Room' sessions, which will provide spaces with toys and books for parents and their babies/young children to spend time together with access to hot/cold drinks. There will be at least two sessions per week at different children's centre sites.
- Increasing funding for Discretionary Housing payments to support low-income residents and families.
- Launch of a community donation initiative to enable people to contribute to support local charities who are supporting residents and families with the increased cost of living.

### **Kingston and Richmond**

The Councils' cost of living hubs set out the support provided for children and families. This includes the use of children's centres and youth centres as warm banks or warm spaces.

### **Lewisham**

Launch of warm welcomes across our Libraries, VCS partners and local businesses. The councils is reopening their Under 5's Stay and Play which will be free of charge for families and include a light breakfast. This provision is being funded by the ward assembly. Another initiative is a series of Cookery Clubs which include healthy eating and budgeting as a main theme.

### **Tower Hamlets**

The Resident Support Scheme is designed to help residents who are either in or at risk of being in crisis or are in need of immediate help and have no source of financial support available to them. Residents are able to submit an application here: [www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/rss](http://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/rss)

Cost of living payments of £50 supermarket vouchers to free school meal children. Payments of £100+ to identified households on lowest income to expenditure bracket (including FSM children, Healthy start eligible households and working households).

The food pantry programme seeks to combine the crisis alleviation of food banks with wrap around holistic support that tackles the root cause issues. Food pantries are accessed on a member-only basis for a period averaging six months, during which members are able to attend a pantry in their local area and pay a weekly fee of £3.50 in return for £25-35 worth of quality fresh and ambient repurposed food. At the same time members are signposted to external support services that work on issues including housing, benefits access, employment, debt and others.

There are a number of food banks in Tower Hamlets across the different wards which operate on a drop-in / open access basis where residents are able to pick up emergency food packages in times of crisis. These are supported with provisions by LBTH.

The Resident Support Outreach Team provides holistic, face-to-face support to residents in outreach locations across the borough. The team speaks multiple community languages and is able to support residents to apply for benefits, grants, and discounts, while also making referrals into other services. Residents can be referred into the service through an online form.

Partnering with The Felix Project and HisChurch, the Food Hub delivers food to over 60 VCS organisations in the borough who go onto benefit a range of vulnerable residents.

Tower Hamlets Community Advice Network (THCAN) is a partnership of local advice centres that provide free advice and representation in areas of social welfare law. The advice centres work together through THCAN to ensure that residents of Tower Hamlets have access to free, high quality advice on welfare benefits, debt, housing, immigration and other areas of social welfare law.

### **Waltham Forest**

Early Help, Children's Social Care, Young Carers, SEND and Care Leavers services are offering vouchers and direct awards to help with food costs to alleviate pressures with utility bills and wider essentials needed.

### **Wandsworth**

Our borough will be providing the following initiatives to support families throughout the winter months (including school holidays):

- Warm Spaces – As a borough, we will be providing numerous 'Warm Spaces' across the borough, both independently and with the voluntary and community sector.
- A Warmer Welcome – an enhanced offer for children and families, delivered from our children's centres
- Our winter 2022 offer delivered from our Children's Centres will offer an inclusive, safe and warm place accessible to all. Where local families, who are experiencing significant financial difficulty can come and spend time, to assist with reducing their fuel and food expenditure. The children's centres will continue to focus on supporting children under the age of five and extended family members (but not exclusive to) for those families who are in need. Breakfast, lunch, dinner and hot drinks will be available for those attending our 'Warmer Welcome' sites.

An experienced catering provider, with a good understanding of our local needs has been commissioned to deliver food in our children's centres.

### **Lambeth**

The council is currently considering how to support residents with hygiene and period poverty, both through voluntary and community sector organisations as well as local schools. In addition, the council is currently exploring how to best support families with clothing this Winter.

Lambeth also has an expanding network of warm spaces in the borough that welcome families with children, with some warm spaces including activities for children. A list of warm spaces and information about the support available in each space can be found at our website:  
[www.lambeth.gov.uk/warm-spaces](http://www.lambeth.gov.uk/warm-spaces)

As plans develop, more information will be available on Lambeth Council's Cost of Living webpage:  
[www.lambeth.gov.uk/cost-living-crisis-support](http://www.lambeth.gov.uk/cost-living-crisis-support)

## **3. How is your Local Authority supporting Foster Carers, Care Leavers and UASC through the Cost of Living crisis?**

### **Barnet**

We have created a new Resident Support Fund of £2m specifically to respond to the Crisis & available to Barnet residents so parents & carers are eligible. This builds on existing support delivered through Discretionary Housing Payments, Household Support Fund (which funds schools' meals and the holiday programme), crisis funds and corporate grants (which covers school uniforms). The Council also funds the VCSF sector to operate a food hub which supports a network of foodbanks across the borough.

Free financial support and advice for our care leavers

<https://www.barnet.gov.uk/benefits-grants-and-financial-advice/cost-living-support>

### **Brent**

- All PAs are attending workshops, held by the Council regarding the cost of living crisis so that they ensure care leavers receive support and also advise them how to make savings regarding heating and electricity bills. This includes ensuring PAs are up to date with the latest welfare benefits arrangements to advise their young people.
- A specific, targeted life skills programme has been established for care leavers to advise them on managing the cost of living.
- Referrals are being made into local foodbanks with whom we have well-established links.
- We have increased our efforts to push more care leavers into EET and out of benefits with targeted focus on those coming out of custody and with additional needs.
- We have commissioned an emotional wellbeing project for care leavers who are former UASC. Managing through the cost of living will be a part of this project.
- We have not yet considered increasing foster care allowances given budgetary pressures. This has not been raised yet by our foster carer forum.

<https://www.brent.gov.uk/costofliving>

## **Camden**

### Foster carers

- We have revised and increased our fostering rates for 2022/23. The increase takes into account inflation and represents an increase of 5.5%. We have also introduced a third age band for older teenagers (16-17yrs) at a higher rate. The new rates are in line with or above those being paid by neighbouring authorities in the North London Consortium and exceed the the DFE 2022/2023 recommended minimum weekly allowances
- We have increased our out of hours payment and holiday allowances.
- We will be agreeing a one off payment of £250 to all Camden foster carers to support with energy costs to be paid in December 2022 .
- We have introduced retention payments at 2, 5,10 and 20 years
- We will also consider the needs of foster carers who are experiencing exceptional financial pressures on an individual basis

### UASC and care leavers

- All UASC who are accepted as being under at an initial screening accommodated under S20, pending an age assessment if the criteria are met . They receive the same level of care and support as any other Looked After child in foster care or Supported Accommodation
- The majority of our care leavers are accommodated in Camden's young people's pathway where they are provided with supported accommodation which enables them to access a level of support appropriate to their needs and independence skills until they are ready to move into their own tenancies . We have identified a need for young people in employment who are on a low or income or zero hours contract to be directly supported with their rent and /or service charges. Allowances are being reviewed in line with the increased cost of living and young people experiencing particular financial stress are being supported with one off expenses on an individual basis.
- Looked After children and care leavers in Camden can access free or significantly subsidised gym membership
- Exemption from council tax in Camden
- Specialist Benefits advisor available weekly by appointment at main office

## **Enfield**

Have set up a hardship fund, increased accessibility to public buildings for shelter, warmth and community kitchens. Holiday and Food fund providing direct support to vulnerable children. All libraries registered with Warm Welcome. These support mechanisms are available to all borough residents.

## **Greenwich**

Greenwich has coordinated its Cost of Living offer under our Greenwich Supports brand. This sets out the available support in respect of benefits, housing etc. In addition as part of each Household Support Fund round, the borough has been making payments of between £100-200 to all Greenwich Care Leavers to help with the costs of food and utilities.

<https://www.royalgreenwich.gov.uk/Greenwich-Supports>

## **Hackney**

- UASC - we are planning to use some food vouchers provided by an earlier vulnerable people's scheme to provide them with additional support, given they are not eligible for government schemes.
- Care leavers - we are talking with our policy team about how provision for care leavers could potentially be prioritised in future government schemes for vulnerable people, if and when they are announced.
- Foster carers - we plan to introduce council tax exemption for foster carers in 2023/4. We are also looking to get them all discount carers cards, so they can benefit from existing schemes that offer discounts to carers.

## **Haringey**

Through the use of government grants, in particular the Household Support Grant.

We have a Cost of Living webpage and hard copy brochure that sets out all that available for residents' dependent on their individual needs.

[https://www.haringey.gov.uk/sites/haringeygovuk/files/cost\\_of\\_living\\_support\\_guide.pdf](https://www.haringey.gov.uk/sites/haringeygovuk/files/cost_of_living_support_guide.pdf)

## **Tower Hamlets**

### **1. Resident Support Scheme**

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### **2. Cost of living payments**

£50 supermarket vouchers to free school meal children. Payments of £100+ to identified households on lowest income to expenditure bracket (including FSM children, Healthy start eligible households and working households)

### **3. Food Pantry programme**

The food pantry programme seeks to combine the crisis alleviation of food banks with wrap around holistic support that tackles the root cause issues. Food pantries are accessed on a member-only basis for a period averaging six months, during which members are able to attend a pantry in their local area and pay a weekly fee of £3.50 in return for £25-35 worth of quality fresh and ambient repurposed food. At the same time members are signposted to external support services that work on issues including housing, benefits access, employment, debt and others.

### **4. Food banks**

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### **5. School uniform grants**

School uniform grants are available for parents or carers who are on a low-income or receiving some form of benefits or receiving support from NASS (National Asylum Support Service).

### **6. Resident Support Outreach Team**

The Resident Support Outreach Team provides holistic, face-to-face support to residents in outreach locations across the borough. The team speaks multiple community languages and is able to support



residents to apply for benefits, grants, and discounts, while also making referrals into other services. Residents can be referred into the service through this online form or by emailing [LBTHResidentSupport@towerhamlets.gov.uk](mailto:LBTHResidentSupport@towerhamlets.gov.uk)

#### 7. Holiday Activities and Food programme

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#### 8. Food Hub

Partnering with The Felix Project and HisChurch, the Food Hub delivers food to over 60 VCS organisations in the borough who go onto benefit a range of vulnerable residents.

#### 9. Tower Hamlets Community Advice Network (THCAN)

THCAN is a partnership of local advice centres that provide free advice and representation in areas of social welfare law. The advice centres work together through THCAN to ensure that residents of Tower Hamlets have access to free, high quality advice on welfare benefits, debt, housing, immigration and other areas of social welfare law.

### **Southwark**

General support for the whole borough in relation to the Cost of Living Crisis is being developed, including:

- Direct advice and guidance to residents
- Training and Resource Pack for multi-agency professionals

Both of the above have been delivered specifically to professionals supporting foster carers, care leavers and UASC.

Additionally the council is extending the Southwark Cost of Living Fund to deliver £2.7m of support to low income households and creation of a new Southwark Energy Advice Service. The funds are being targeted at families and individuals on benefits or on the edge of receiving benefits/or who have not yet been identified as eligible for benefits. There are ongoing discussions with our finance department on a targeted proportion of the fund to address the additional needs of Foster Carers, Care Leavers and UASC. Beyond the additional fund, those groups will be supported on a case by case basis from additional social care budgets.