

Appendix A HSF MOW Justification

(Preferred Option) The Council could adopt a new approach compliant with government guidance and fund preventative work in the borough for example continuing the current meals on wheels subsidy:

This approach would address key issues affecting elderly residents, particularly those related to food insecurity, financial hardship, and isolation.

a. Aligning with Government Guidance for Household Support Fund Phase 6

Phase 6, has clear objectives aimed at providing financial assistance to vulnerable households, especially those struggling with rising costs of living, food, and essential items. Phase 6 guidance also highlights the need to target assistance toward households facing the most significant financial pressures, including low-income families and elderly individuals who are particularly susceptible to food insecurity and inflation impacts.

The guidance suggests that councils focus their HSF allocations on necessities, including food support, energy, and other essential costs. A meals-on-wheels subsidy for elderly residents directly addresses these priorities by ensuring that vulnerable individuals have access to nutritious, affordable meals, thereby reducing their food expenses and mitigating the impact of inflation on their limited budgets.

b. Addressing Food Insecurity Among the Elderly

One of the main purposes of the HSF is to alleviate food insecurity. Many elderly people, especially those on fixed incomes, find it challenging to afford groceries, particularly as food prices continue to increase. By using HSF Phase 6 funding to subsidise a meals-on-wheels service, the Council can provide consistent access to hot, nutritious meals for elderly residents who might otherwise skip meals or face malnutrition due to financial constraints.

Subsidising a meals-on-wheels service not only makes food accessible but also ensures that meals are tailored to meet the dietary and nutritional needs of elderly people, who may have specific health concerns. This is a proactive step that aligns with the government's objective of using the HSF to promote health and well-being among vulnerable groups.

c. Tackling Loneliness and Isolation

HSF Phase 6 also emphasises supporting vulnerable groups, and the elderly are particularly at risk of isolation, especially if they have limited mobility or live alone. Meals-on-wheels involves regular visits from delivery personnel, which can provide essential social interaction for elderly residents. These interactions have been shown to reduce

loneliness and contribute to the mental health resilience of elderly individuals.

A subsidised meals-on-wheels program also allows cares, local authorities, and community organisations to maintain regular contact with elderly residents, monitoring their well-being and providing additional support if needed. This community-focused aspect aligns with the fund's broader goals of fostering resilience and safeguarding the well-being of vulnerable groups.

d. Financial Relief Amidst Rising Living Costs

With the cost of living rising, the elderly face significant financial challenges. Many elderly individuals live on fixed incomes, which are particularly susceptible to inflation. Government guidance underlines the importance of providing financial relief for essential needs like food and utilities, and a subsidised meals-on-wheels service can be part of a holistic strategy to address these needs.

The low cost of meals allows elderly residents to allocate their limited resources to other essential expenses, such as heating, rent, and medication. The meals-on-wheels subsidy, therefore, directly alleviates financial stress, fulfilling the HSF's mandate to offer targeted financial support to those most affected by inflation and the current economic climate.

In summary, subsidising a meals-on-wheels service using the Household Support Fund Phase 6 aligns closely with government guidance by addressing core priorities: food security, financial relief, social support, and community well-being. This approach recognises the unique vulnerabilities of elderly residents, supports their physical and mental health, and provides essential assistance in the face of rising costs. This also creates an opportunity to offer a limited service to others suffering food poverty with the option of having a time limited 'frozen' offer for residents who are referred into the meals on wheels service via statutory agencies and the voluntary sector.