



Cllr Andreas Kirsch

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13th February 2024

Rt. Hon. Jeremy Hunt MP

Chancellor of the Exchequer
1 Horse Guards Road
London
SW1A 2HQ

Dear Chancellor,

RE: Household Support Fund 2024/25

I write this letter in my capacity as Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Finance for the Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames (RBK). RBK has welcomed the range of measures that you announced in the Autumn Statement, particularly those that will help to support low-income London households such as the planned uprating of Local Housing Allowance and increase in Universal Credit and the state pension from April 2024.

Given the ongoing financial pressures facing some of our most vulnerable residents, I was pleased to hear you respond positively to Sir Stephen Timms MP's question in the House as to whether the Household Support Fund would continue into the next financial year. However, I am extremely concerned to have not yet received confirmation of the funding allocation for RBK. I urge you to meet this commitment made in Parliament and provide councils with confirmation of a Household Support Fund, or suitable equivalent funding, to be provided in 2024/25. As much notice as possible regarding the fund will enable effective planning and setting up of policies and processes, allowing us to achieve maximum benefits and value for money.

The experience of the Covid pandemic, followed by the cost-of-living crisis, has impacted Kingston residents' overall financial resilience, and the colder winter months have compounded the financial difficulties that our residents are facing. RBK's recent Cost of Living Survey has highlighted the impact of these pressures locally, and the need for

continued targeted support. 38% of respondents reported being either unable to cope with rising costs (12%) or having to make significant changes to cope (26%), with food, energy costs, home maintenance, accommodation and health being the areas of greatest impact. More than half (55%) said they had to rely on savings to pay for everyday bills, and the same percentage said they had to borrow money from family/friends. In this context the Household Support Fund has proven a vital means for the borough to help our lowest income residents to cope with the increased cost of living.

Kingston Council is on track to spend our full allocation of £1.7 million to help residents who are struggling to afford essentials such as food, heating and fuel. This has included supporting our local voluntary sector, for example, providing grants to organisations providing fuel support, food redistribution and community resources. These grants have supported our voluntary sector, at a time when they too have increased costs, and allowed them to focus on doing what they do best, which is supporting residents and providing individual and community resilience over the longer term. These longer-term solutions have included establishing a community kitchen and making fuel efficiencies in people's homes such as replacing boilers.

Going forward, we are looking to build on current initiatives and respond to the outcomes from recent and upcoming audits. Continued funding for 2024/25 would enable us to continue to set up a longer-term, targeted approach to provide sustainable solutions for residents, such as a wider rollout of energy efficiency measures for households and further community kitchens, creating resilience in our communities and reducing the future need for crisis interventions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Andreas Kirsch". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Cllr Andreas Kirsch