

Household Support Fund 2023/24 – Detailed proposal and rules

Background

The Government is providing further funding in 2023/24 to Local Authorities to help with global inflationary challenges and the rising cost of living through the Household Support Fund. The grant scheme will cover the period 01.04.2023 to 31.03.2024 inclusive and may be delivered in partnership with third sector organisations to provide support to local authority residents.

This is the fourth iteration of the Household Support Fund. The council has previously used this funding to support households whose children receive income-related Free school Meals during school holiday periods and has worked with Citizens Advice B&NES to support their delivery of the Fuel Voucher scheme. The latest iteration also included provision of small grants to households to help with energy costs over the winter of 2022.

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) have provided some guidance to local authorities to help with the design their local support schemes and have set out an expectation that the forthcoming scheme, HSF4, should support households most in need, particularly those who do not qualify for other government support but are nonetheless in financial crisis. This could include households where residents do not receive benefits but are nonetheless on a low income relative to the size of the households, or those who have not been included in separate government support schemes because they do not receive specific benefits. The DWP guidance also suggests that Local Authorities should prioritise supporting households with energy costs and should consider how the needs of disabled persons, carers and care-leavers may be met, as these groups of people may face a disproportionate impact caused by rising energy costs because of the additional services which they require.

Allocation

The council's allocation for 2023/24 is £1.934M and this must be spent within the financial year, and any unspent funds must be retained by the government. There is no suggestion at this point that the scheme will be extended into 2024/25. The funding will be received in arrears and is conditional on quarterly management information returns being submitted to the DWP detailing expenditure and recipient profile.

Eligible support

Energy and Water

Food

Essentials linked to Energy and Water

Wider Essentials

Advice Services (this must be linked to the delivery of practical support e.g., distributing vouchers)

Housing Costs (in exceptional circumstances)

Reasonable Administration costs

Further Requirements

Local Authorities must deliver part of their scheme through an application-based system which is open to residents for 12 months of the year continuously, or in regular intervals throughout the year.

Establishing eligibility

Within the constraints of the DWP guidance Local Authorities are free to decide on which residents will be eligible for support, the amount of support to be provided and the way support may be provided.

Proposal.

Officers have carefully considered how support has been delivered in the past through the Household Support Fund and have consulted with staff and partner organisations on possible delivery mechanisms which meet the DWP guidance and grant conditions.

Area	Amount	Comments
Free School Meal Vouchers	£800,000	This is based on supporting 4,100 children with vouchers worth £15 per week for 13 weeks of the year.
Contribution to Citizens Advice B&NES Fuel Voucher scheme	£250,000	This amount has been requested by Citizens Advice to support residents over a 12-month period. CA will retain 20% of the funding to cover the cost of purchasing the vouchers (around 8.5% of the face value) and their own staffing costs and will distribute the remainder of the funding in a staggered approach with most of the support delivered in the winter months of 2023.
Grant Payments to Care experienced young people in B&NES	£50,000	Rachael Ward has requested that Care experienced young people be provided with some financial support drawn from the Household Support Fund to help them with Essentials linked to energy, food and water costs. £200 grants will be

		paid direct to these residents or to their PA's and support workers where appropriate. There are approximately 234 young people in this group.
Crisis payments to Households in B&NES	£350,000	Payments of £50, £100 and £150 will be made to banes residents in financial crisis during 2023/24 to help with food, energy and bills. This will be an application-based scheme which will run for the rest of the financial year and payments will be carefully monitored to ensure that monthly amounts are not exceeded. Applications will be made via telephone and web-form, and logged onto a case management and payment system developed during previous iterations of the Household Support Fund. The expected volumes are around 2000 awards.
Winter Support payments	£400,000	<p>Payments of £150 and £250 will be made to low-income households in financial crisis to help with energy costs during the winter months. Applications will be made by web form and telephone to the Welfare Support team. Expected volumes are around 1500 households.</p> <p>£45,000 of this funding will be ring-fenced to provide extra support to residents who have experienced mental ill health, unpaid Carers, and Pensioner households. Ringfenced</p>

		funding will be delivered by partner organisations.
Administration costs	£84,000	£84,000 will be charged against the grant allocation to cover administration costs, including staff and IT costs, communications and web-design and financial costs associated with up-front funding of the schemes.
Total	£1,934,000	Delivery of the schemes and the finance allocated may be subject to change as demand fluctuates during the course of the year.

Eligibility Criteria

For all schemes, the household must be permanently resident in B&NES or B&NES must have a legal responsibility for the education or care of the resident concerned.

Free School Meal Vouchers – Households will be entitled to one voucher of £15 per child per week where the child is entitled to income-related Free School Meals. This offer will also apply to children who are in early years settings where they would otherwise qualify for income-related Free School Meals if they were in Key Stage 2, or if the child eligible for 2 year old funded childcare <https://www.gov.uk/help-with-childcare-costs/free-childcare-2-year-olds> .

Citizen Advice Fuel Voucher Scheme – Eligibility will be determined by Citizens Advice Bath and North East Somerset and will focus on residents who are in fuel poverty

Grant payments to Care experienced residents – eligibility and the manner of payment will be determined by the B&NES Care Experienced team.

Crisis payments to B&NES residents – eligibility will be determined by officers working in the Welfare Support service. To qualify for these payments residents will be on a low income* and in financial crisis**. Payments will be made at amounts of £50, £100, and £150 depending on how much support the applicant and their family need. The funding for this scheme will be strictly controlled and once the monthly allocation has been exhausted no further payments will be made until the 1st day of the following month. Residents will only be able to access this fund once during 2023/24 unless there are exceptional circumstances.

Winter Support payments – eligibility will be determined where the applicant is on a low income*. One off payments of £200 will be issued and this will be increased by £100 where the applicant or someone in their household receives Disability Living

Allowance, Personal Independence Payment, or Attendance Allowance. Once the funding has been exhausted no further payments will be made. Ringfenced funding will be allocated to partner organisations to be decided by the council to support unpaid carers, pensioner households and residents suffering from mental ill-health. The partner organisations will decide on eligibility and the manner in which support will be provided for their grant allocation.

* Low income means entitled to an income related benefit, Pension Credit or Universal Credit, or combined household income from earnings and pensions of less than £500 per week and with savings of less than £2,000. In exceptional circumstances officers will be able to make an award at their discretion where the applicant does not meet the low-income conditions. This will be considered on a case-by-case basis and decisions will be made balancing the needs of the applicant and the available budget and the council's requirement to support other households in financial crisis.

** For the purposes of this scheme a person will be considered to be in financial crisis if they are unable to meet basic living costs for food, shelter and clothing, taking into account the resources they have available to them.

Rationale

This proposal satisfies the Household Support Fund grant conditions and DWP guidance. It will make use of existing IT and Administration systems which have been developed over previous iterations of the Household Support Fund. Feedback from staff working in the Welfare Support team and partner organisations and recipients suggests that Free School Meal vouchers and small grant payments to residents in financial crisis are an effective way of using the grant funding to support residents with cost-of-living pressures. Energy costs are a particularly difficult area for providing support to residents as households differ in how they access and pay for energy, but this proposal should ensure that residents are not excluded.

The proposal also ensures that help can be provided to households who may have missed out on other Government support, who are likely to meet the condition of being in financial crisis, and that the needs of disabled people, carers and care experienced residents are prioritised. It also ensures that part of the scheme will be delivered as an application-based crisis support scheme available to residents for the duration of the financial year.