

## **Household Support Fund 2024/25 – Detailed proposal and rules**

### Background

The Government is providing further funding in 2024/25 to Local Authorities to help with essential living costs through the Household Support Fund. The grant scheme will cover the period 1<sup>st</sup> of April 2024 to the 30<sup>th</sup> of September 2024 and may be delivered in partnership with third sector organisations to provide support to B&NES residents.

This is the fifth 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, and other partner organisations. The latest iteration of this scheme also included provision of small grants to households to help with energy costs over the winter of 2023.

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, HSF5, 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 their size, or those who have not been included in previous government support schemes because they do not receive specific benefits.

The DWP guidance also suggests that Local Authorities should prioritise support for households with energy costs and should consider how the needs of disabled persons, carers, and care- leavers may be met, as these groups may face a disproportionate impact caused by rising energy costs, because of the additional services they require.

### Allocation

The council's allocation for 2024/25 is £967,000 and this must be spent by 30<sup>th</sup> September 2024 and any unspent allocation will be retained by the government. There is no suggestion at this point that the scheme will be extended beyond 30<sup>th</sup> September. The funding will be received in arrears and is conditional on 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 the duration of the scheme. There are also

requirements which cover the content of communications material relating to the scheme.

### 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	£430,500	This is based on supporting 4,100 children with vouchers worth £15.00 per week for 7 weeks of the year to cover the Whitsun half term period and summer holiday period.
Contribution to Citizens Advice B&NES Fuel Voucher scheme	£125,000	This amount has been agreed with Citizens Advice to support residents over a 6-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 an approach of their choosing through vouchers and direct payment to residents and energy accounts.
Grant Payments to Care Experienced young people in B&NES	£15,000	The Care Experienced team have requested that their clients are provided with some financial

		<p>support drawn from the Household Support Fund to help them with Essentials linked to energy, food and water costs. Small 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.</p>
<p>Crisis payments to Households in B&amp;NES</p>	<p>£177,500</p>	<p>Individual payments of will be made to banes residents in financial crisis during the period April to September to help with food, energy and bills. This will be an application-based scheme which will run for 6 months 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 500 awards.</p>
<p>Local Welfare Provision (LWP)</p>	<p>£95,000</p>	<p>The council will charge £95,000 of LWP expenditure to the Household Support Fund grant allocation during the months of April to September. This will enable the Welfare Support team to use the full annual LWP budget of £190,000 for the period October 2023 to</p>

		March 2024 to support residents over the last half of the 2024/25 financial year and avoid a dramatic reduction in support when the Household Support Fund ends.
Age UK Bath and North East Somerset	£16,000	A contribution to subsidize meals for elderly residents who are unable to cook and prepare food for themselves.
Bath and North East Somerset Carers Centre	£35,000	Funding for the Carers Centre to provide grants to clients in need to support with essentials like food and energy costs.
Bath Mind	£25,000	Funding for Bath Mind to provide grants to clients in need to support with essentials like food and energy costs.
Clean Slate	£15,000	Funding to provide supermarket vouchers to clients who engage with the financial health check process, to provide immediate relief for residents who need help with food.
Council Administration costs	£33,000	This is based on the equivalent of one FTE Welfare Support officer plus employer costs.
<b>Total</b>	<b>£967,000.</b>	These proposals may be altered depending on demand and how resident's needs present during the next 6 months.

## 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 different amounts 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 1<sup>st</sup> day of the following month. Residents will only be able to access this fund once during 2023/24 unless there are exceptional circumstances.

**Payments to Clean Slate** – Eligibility will be determined by that organization, working with clients who engage with the Money Health Check service.

**Payments to Age UK Bath and North East Somerset** – this will subsidize meals for residents who are unable to cook and prepare meals in their own home.

**Payments to Bath MIND** – this will be disbursed to residents working with Bath Mind, to help with essential living costs.

**Payments to Bath and North East Somerset Carers Centre** – this will be disbursed to Carers and their families by the Carers Centre to help with essential living costs.

\* 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.

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 scheme.