

Household Support Fund 7 2025/26 – Detailed proposal and rules

Background

The Government is providing funding in 2025/26 for Local Authorities to support those most in need with the cost of essentials through the Household Support Fund. The next iteration of the grant scheme will cover the period 01.04.2025 to 31.03.2026, and as with previous iterations may be delivered in partnership with third sector organisations to provide support to B&NES residents.

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 a Fuel Voucher scheme.

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) has provided guidance to councils to help with the design their local support schemes, and have set an expectation that the latest round of funding should primarily be used to provide crisis support for households struggling to afford essentials, including energy and water bills, food, and household items. The secondary use of the funding is to provide preventative support, which has a longer-term sustainable impact alongside crisis support.

Allocation

The council's allocation for the period 01.04.2025 to 31.03.2026 is £1.705M. This must be spent within the financial year, and any unspent allocation will be retained by the government. There is no suggestion at this point that the scheme will be extended into 2026/27. 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

Crisis support

- Food
- Energy and Water
- Essentials linked to Energy and Water
- Wider Essentials
- Household items
- Carpets
- Furnishings
- Utility bills
- Housing Support excluding mortgage support (only after existing support mechanisms have been exhausted).

Preventative support

- Advice Services (this should be linked to the delivery of practical support)
- Join-up between service providers, such as co-location points
- Any support with the aim of providing longer-term and sustainable solutions to families in crisis

Administration costs

Reasonable costs incurred in the provision of setting up and administering the scheme. As a guide, the guidance states that most councils spent around 5% of their grant allocation on administration costs during previous iterations of the scheme.

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 this period.

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.

Service/Organisation	Budget allocation	Type of support	Details
Free School Meal Vouchers.	£800,000	Crisis	Based on 4100 children @ £15 per child per week. Excludes Easter 2026 holiday.
Citizens Advice Fuel/Food crisis scheme.	£250,000	Crisis	Citizens Advice will retain 20% of their allocation for administration costs for distribution and the cost of

			purchasing vouchers.
Carers' Centre grant support scheme.	£70,000	Crisis	To provide financial support to carers for energy/living costs
Care Experienced team.	£25,000	Crisis	To help Care experienced young people with day to day living expenses and one-off items of expenditure
Discretionary Crisis Fund.	£300,000	Crisis	This will be the application-based support scheme which has previously been available to residents in financial crisis.
Oasis Hub and Pantry	£19,000	Preventative	Funding to temporarily support running costs for the Oasis Hub and food pantry pending an application for core funding to the National Lottery
Bath Mind crisis scheme.	£50,000	Preventative	To provide preventative support to clients through partial funding of the Breathing Space service for 2025/26.
Clean Slate Financial Health check scheme	£35,000	Preventative	To provide supermarket vouchers and wrap around advice for clients who agree to participate in the Clean Slate Financial health check.
Future Bright.	£30,000	Preventative	To enable the funding of wider

			expenditure to assist residents to access work. For example, payment for uniforms and interview expenses, critical training, transport and driving lessons.
Community Engagement team crisis prevention	£50,000	Preventative	Initiatives led and supported by the Community Engagement team to provide preventative support through the Community Wellbeing Hub and partner organisations.
Administration costs	£76,000	N/A	This is based on costs of just under 5% of the total grant funding and will cover staffing costs, IT enhancements and additional admin costs.
Total	£1,705,000.00		

These proposals meet the grant conditions of focussing on crisis and preventative support for low-income households and will reach a wide range of vulnerable residents through distribution by partner organisations. It also allows for residents in need to apply for financial support direct from the council for the whole of 2025/26 via the Discretionary Crisis Fund.

Eligibility Criteria for Crisis Support

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.

Discretionary Crisis Fund 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 varying amounts depending on how much support the applicant and their family need, subject to a limit of £500. 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 2025/26 unless there are exceptional circumstances.

Bath and North East Somerset Carers' Centre
Eligibility will be determined by the Carers' Centre

* 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, and with appropriate authorisation at levels above £500. 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 deemed to be in financial crisis if they are unable to meet basic living costs for food, shelter and clothing, having considered the resources available to them.

Rationale

This proposal satisfies the Household Support Fund grant conditions and DWP guidance. It will make use of some 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.

This iteration of the Household Support Fund includes a secondary focus on Preventative Support, and these proposals have been developed to engage partner organisations to provide residents with services which have a longer-term sustainable impact, to stop families and individuals falling into crisis, or further into

crisis. This includes measures to assist families in budgeting, provision of mental health support, and funding to facilitate the co-location of support sector organisations to serve B&NES residents more effectively.

These proposals also ensure that help can be provided to households who may have missed out on other Government support, but who are likely to meet the condition of being in financial crisis, and that the needs of families with children, 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.