

Household Support Fund (1 April 2022 – 30 September 2022) – FINAL Guidance (Edited)

Introduction

1. £421 million has been made available to County Councils and Unitary Authorities in England to support those most in need to help with significantly rising living costs. This funding covers the period 01 April 2022 to 30 September 2022 inclusive. Local Authorities have discretion on exactly how this funding is used within the scope set out in the accompanying grant determination and this guidance. The expectation is that it should primarily be used to support households in the most need particularly those including children and pensioners who would otherwise struggled with energy bills, food and water bills. Energy bills may be of particular concern to low income households during the period of the scheme and Local Authorities should especially consider how they can support households with the cost of energy. It can also be used to support households with essential costs related to those items and with wider essential costs. In exceptional cases of genuine emergency it can additionally be used to support housing costs where existing housing support schemes do not meet this exceptional need.
2. The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) is providing funding to County Councils and Unitary Authorities (including Metropolitan Councils and London Boroughs), under section 31 of the Local Government Act 2003, to administer the scheme and provide assistance to households most in need. It is important to stress this covers a wide range of low income households in need including families with children of all ages, pensioners, and other low income households, particularly those who cannot increase their income through work, to prevent escalation of problems. **Note: County Councils and Unitary Authorities will be referred to as 'Authorities' throughout the remainder of this guidance.**
3. Authorities have the ability to deliver the scheme through a variety of routes including providing vouchers to households, making direct provision of food or goods, or issuing grants to third parties (with the exception of grants for advice provision). Authorities have the local ties and knowledge, making them best placed to identify and help those most in need. Authorities must work together with District Councils to ensure the funding meets its objectives by identifying those most in need.
4. This guidance sets out the required collaboration between DWP, Authorities, including their delivery partners, including District Councils as well as any charitable organisations etc, to successfully meet the policy intent within the agreed framework. It also provides the constraints that Authorities need to work within and the distribution of funding and reporting arrangements.
5. Rather than focus on one specific vulnerable group, Authorities should use the wide range of data and sources of information at their disposal to identify and provide support to a broad cross section of vulnerable households to prevent escalation of problems. Authorities should particularly consider how they can support low income households that cannot increase their income through work, such as pensioners, people with disabilities, unpaid carers and parents of very young children in their area.
6. However, support is not restricted to vulnerable households in receipt of benefits. Therefore, Authorities should also use other sources of information to identify vulnerable households, including advice from professionals who come into contact with vulnerable households such as social workers and Supporting Families advisors.
7. This guidance applies to Authorities in England only and should be read in conjunction with the Household Support Fund Grant Determination issued alongside it.

Objective and key principles

8. The objective of the Household Support Fund is to provide support to vulnerable households in most need of support to help with significantly rising living costs.
9. Although this is an extension to the original Household Support Fund, it is a new grant subject to its own grant conditions as set out in the Grant Determination letter. Any underspends from the previous scheme cannot be carried forward.
10. Funds should be spent or committed before 30 September 2022 and cannot be held over for future usage.
11. When administering this scheme, you are encouraged to adopt the following principles:
 - use discretion on how to identify and support those most in need, taking into account a wide range of information;
 - use the funding from 01 April 2022 to 30 September 2022 to meet immediate needs and help those who are struggling to afford energy, food and water bills, and other related essentials. You can also use the funding to support households who are struggling to afford wider essentials;
 - In exceptional cases of genuine emergency, the funding can additionally be used to support housing costs where existing housing support schemes do not meet this exceptional need, subject to the provisions at paragraph 17 below.
 - This includes payments made, or committed to, by the Authority or any person acting on behalf of the Authority, from 01 April 2022 to 30 September 2022. For example, this would allow any vouchers issued before the end of the funding period to be redeemed in October 2022. All authorities are encouraged to ensure that any vouchers issued are redeemed before the end of the scheme, or shortly thereafter, or consider recycling unused vouchers;
 - work together with District Councils including, where necessary and appropriate, other local services, such as social and care workers to help identify and support households within the scope of the scheme.
12. When deciding how to help people, you should consider:
 - how you plan to provide support to vulnerable households, i.e. paying into bank accounts, use of cash and vouchers;
 - any risks associated with these payment methods – see section Managing the risk of fraud.

Working with other organisations

13. Authorities should develop a 'local eligibility framework and approach' to enable them to distribute grant funding that best supports households most in need. At least one third of the funding is for vulnerable households with children (see the definition of a child under paragraph 22 below and paragraph 5(a) of the Grant Conditions). At least one third of the funding is for pensioners. The remainder of the funding (up to one third) can be available for other vulnerable households (without children or pensioners including individuals) or for additional spend on the named groups
14. Authorities have flexibility to develop a local delivery approach that best fits the scheme's objectives. Where Authorities choose to work with multiple organisations to provide a local delivery network or where Authorities engage with District Councils to deliver this grant on their behalf, detailed arrangements and funding should be made available to those organisations as soon as possible so that support for vulnerable households can be provided as soon as is practically possible.
15. Authorities must work collaboratively with District Councils and other organisations in their area who may come into contact with those households who are eligible and would benefit from this grant. Authorities that do not have the mechanisms in place to administer this grant should consider whether District Councils are better placed to do so on their behalf. If Authorities decide to engage with District Councils in this way they are encouraged to do so as quickly as possible to ensure roles, responsibilities and effective arrangements are put in place to deliver the scheme promptly and

efficiently. Where Authorities are working with Third Party Organisations (TPOs), this should be done on an objectively fair, transparent and non-discriminatory basis, having regard to the time available to deliver the scheme.

Establishing eligibility

16. Authorities have the flexibility within the scheme to identify which vulnerable households are in most need of support and apply their own discretion when identifying eligibility. In doing so they should particularly consider households who cannot increase their income through work. Authorities can request applications for support or can proactively identify households who may benefit or can take a mixture of the two approaches. Where Authorities are proactively identifying households they should consider how they can ensure that they are focusing on those in the most need to prevent escalation of problems. There is no requirement for Authorities to undertake a means test or conduct a benefit check unless this specifically forms part of the Authority's local eligibility criteria. However, in relation to housing costs, Authorities must establish whether other forms of support are available to the household, such as Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs). In accordance with their general legal duties, Authorities must have a clear rationale or documented policy/framework outlining their approach including how they are defining eligibility and how households access the scheme. We expect Authorities to review any existing approach and to have a strong rationale for their targeting so that funding is available to the households who most need it.
17. Awards must be based on the following framework:
 - at least one third of the total funding will be ring-fenced to support households with children, at least one third of the total funding will be ring fenced to support pensioners with up to one third of the total funding to other households genuinely in need of support. This may include households not currently in receipt of DWP welfare benefits;
 - Eligible spend includes:
 - Energy and water. The Fund should primarily be used to support with energy bills for any form of fuel that is used for the purpose of domestic heating, cooking or lighting, including oil or portable gas cylinders. It can also be used to support with water bills including for drinking, washing, cooking, and sanitary purposes and sewerage.
 - Food. The Fund should also primarily be used to provide support with food whether in kind or through vouchers or cash.
 - Essentials linked to energy and water. The Fund can be used to provide support with essentials linked to energy and water (including sanitary products, warm clothing, soap, blankets, boiler service/repair, purchase of equipment including fridges, freezers, ovens, etc.), in recognition that a range of costs may arise which directly affect a household's ability to afford or access energy , food and water.
 - Wider essentials. The Fund can be used to support with wider essential needs not linked to energy and water should Authorities consider this appropriate in their area. These may include, but are not limited to, support with other bills including broadband or phone bills, clothing, and essential transport-related costs such as repairing a car, buying a bicycle or paying for fuel. This list is not exhaustive.
 - Housing Costs. In exceptional cases of genuine emergency where existing housing support schemes do not meet this exceptional need, the Fund can be used to support housing costs. Where eligible, ongoing housing support for rent must be provided

through the housing cost element of Universal Credit (UC) and Housing Benefit (HB) rather than the Household Support Fund. In addition, eligibility for DHPs must first be considered before emergency housing support is offered through the Household Support Fund. The Authority must also first consider whether the claimant is at statutory risk of homelessness and therefore owed a duty of support through the Homelessness Prevention Grant (HPG).

- In exceptional cases of genuine emergency, households in receipt of HB, UC, or DHPs can still receive housing cost support through the Household Support Fund if it is deemed necessary by their Authority. However, the Fund should not be used to provide housing support on an ongoing basis or to support unsustainable tenancies.
 - Individuals in receipt of some other form of housing support could still qualify for the other elements of the Household Support Fund, such as food, energy, water, essentials linked to energy and water and wider essentials.
 - The Fund cannot be used to provide mortgage support, though homeowners could still qualify for the other elements of the Fund (such as energy, food, water, essentials linked to energy and water and wider essentials). Where a homeowner is having difficulty with their mortgage payments, they should contact their lender as soon as possible to discuss their circumstances as lenders will have a set procedure to assist.
 - The Fund can exceptionally and in genuine emergency be used to provide support for historic rent arrears built up prior to an existing benefit claim for households already in receipt of Universal Credit and Housing Benefit. This is because these arrears are excluded from the criteria for DHPs. However, support with rent arrears is not the primary intent of the fund and should not be the focus of spend.
- Reasonable administrative costs. This includes reasonable costs incurred administering the scheme. These include for example:
 - staff costs
 - advertising and publicity to raise awareness of the scheme
 - web page design
 - printing application forms
 - small IT changes, for example, to facilitate MI production
- Eligible spend does not include:
 - Advice services including debt advice;
 - Mortgage costs.
 - It is expected that the focus of support should be on bills and food and that support for housing costs should only be given in exceptional cases of genuine emergency. Beyond this, Authorities have discretion to determine the most appropriate scheme for their area, based on their understanding of local need and with due regard to equality considerations.
 - Individual awards can be whatever type and amount is deemed appropriate by Authorities for the receiving household, bearing in mind the overall spend eligibility priorities listed above and the risk of fraud and error. Awards to any given household can either cover only one of the spend eligibility categories listed above, or can cover several.
 - Authorities should not make Household Support Fund eligibility conditional on being employed or self-employed, or directly linked to a loss of earnings from employment or self-employment.

This will ensure that there is no National Insurance Contribution liability payable on any payments by either the claimant, the Authority or employer.

Definitions

18. For the purpose of this grant (and without prejudice to other schemes):

- The definition of a household with a child is a household containing any person:
 - who will be under the age of 19 as at 30 September 2022 or
 - a person aged 19 or over in respect of whom a child-related benefit (for example, Child Benefit) is paid or free school meals are provided.
- Where an eligible child lives on his or her own, they are a household that includes a child covered in the one third allocation for households with children.
- The definition of a household with a pensioner is any household containing any person:
 - who has reached state pension age by 30th September 2022 (and no eligible children as defined above are resident)

19. Households which include a person aged 19 to 25 with special educational needs and disability (SEND) and/or care leavers may still be eligible for grant support however that support falls within the one third allocation to other households (without children or pensioners).

20. There is no prescriptive definition of essentials. Authorities have discretion to assess what is reasonable to assist those in genuine need this winter with regard to the examples above.

21. Third party organisations may include but are not limited to:

- Registered charities and voluntary organisations
- Schools
- Food banks
- General Practitioners
- Care organisations

Additional guidance and examples when working with TPOs

22. Please include, where possible, the amount of spend across the following categories:

- households with children, households with pensioners, other households, and
- energy and water bills, essentials linked to energy and water bills, wider essentials, and (in exceptional circumstances) housing costs.

23. For example, if you have allocated:

- grant funding to a food bank to provide food to vulnerable people, establish the amount of that allocation the food bank has spent and enter the full amount spent under food as you know that the grant allocation has been spent in respect of food, and provide the split across households with and without children to the best of your ability in accordance with the example below.
- grant funding to a charity that specialises in providing vulnerable children with clothing, establish the amount of that allocation the charity has spent and enter the full amount spent in 'households with children' and the full amount of the grant spent in 'wider essentials'. This is because you know that the purpose of the grant is for children and the nature of support is clothing which comes under wider essentials.

24. The amount of MI available will vary considerably across each TPO. Please use whatever information is already available or reasonable to collect to be as accurate as possible.

Administration costs

25. The Household Support Fund funding allocation includes reasonable administration costs to enable Authorities to deliver the scheme. Authorities should deduct their administration costs from the total allocation to determine the amount remaining.
26. In all cases, Authorities should keep administrative costs to a reasonable level.
27. Administration costs for each Authority will be published on www.gov.uk alongside detail of all spend related to this scheme.

Public Sector Equality Duty

28. In accordance with the public sector equality duty, DWP has had due regard for the potential equalities impacts of this grant.
29. Under the Equality Act 2010, all public authorities must comply with the Public Sector Equality Duty. For the purposes of this grant, you should consider how any support that helps people facing severe financial hardship impacts those with characteristics protected under the Equality Act.
30. When developing your local delivery frameworks, you should ensure people are not disadvantaged or treated unfairly by this scheme. For example, any application process should be easy to access and to navigate.