

GUIDELINES FOR THE AWARD OF HOUSEHOLD SUPPORT GRANTS FOR 2022/23

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Government has provided funding of £1,201,485 to the Council under the Household Support Fund. The funding is for the period 1 April 2022 to 30 September 2022 and is 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. It is a Government requirement that at least one third of the funding is used to assist vulnerable households with children and at least one third of the funding is used to assist people of pension age. The remainder of the funding can be used to assist other vulnerable households (without children or pensioners including individuals) or for additional spend on the named groups.
- 1.2 Therefore, the Council has committed to distributing a proportion of the funding available to the Council through the Household Support Grant Fund to household with children that qualify for free school meals since these families are considered to be vulnerable and most in need of additional support. This will assist families on very low income to meet the cost of food during school holidays when costs are higher.
- 1.3 The Council has a Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme which provides a Council Tax Support discount of up to 100% to households on a low income. These households are considered to be vulnerable due to the low level of income and are recognised to be those most likely to be in need of addition support with the cost of food and utilities.
- 1.4 There will also be householders who are not directly liable for Council Tax but are on a similar level of income and, therefore, will also be vulnerable and may be in need of assistance.
- 1.5 The Council wishes to minimise the costs of administering the grants to maximise the funds that can be distributed to assist households in need. It also wishes to ensure the application process is a simple as possible for residents.
- 1.6 These guidelines, therefore, enable the Household Support Grant Fund held by the Council to be distributed to households in the Borough who are vulnerable because they are on the lowest level of income as identified through entitlement to free school meals or Council Tax Support, or on a similar level of income.

1.7 The Household Support Grant fund is a form of Local Welfare Provision. In addition to this grant scheme the Council also has an existing Local Welfare Provision Crisis Grants scheme which may provide further assistance to persons experiencing difficulty in meeting the cost of essential such as food or utilities regardless of whether or not they qualify for a grant under these guidelines.

2. Prioritisation

2.1 Under these guidelines the Council is prioritising grants to:

- a) Families with children entitled to free school meals
- b) Households who are vulnerable because they have the lowest levels of income (as assessed through the Council Tax Support application process, which provides a high level of certainty regarding the household income)

2.2 Funding is also allocated to support households that are not liable to pay Council Tax because they live in shared accommodation where the landlord is responsible for the Council Tax, are exempt from Council Tax or live in a commercial property.

3. Limits on Total Expenditure

3.2 These guidelines will ensure that a minimum of one third of the funding is used to support families with children and at least one third is used to support households with a person of pension age.

3.3 The Government funding is capped, therefore, the intention is that total amount of grants paid shall not exceed the total amount of funding available, including any additional funding that the Council may at its discretion allocate to the fund. In the event the funding is likely to be oversubscribed the application process may be suspended.

4. Person Eligible for a Household Support Grant under these Guidelines

A. Families with Children Receiving Free School Meals

Families with a child receiving free school meals will be provided with a school holiday meals voucher for school holidays up to an included the 2022 summer holiday period. The vouchers will be for £15 per week of school holiday per child.

B. Persons Receiving 100% Council Tax Support – the “Council Taxpayer”

A Council Taxpayer that is receiving a 100% Council Tax Support discount from the Council at the time they apply for a Household Support Grant will qualify for an award. A Council Taxpayer that is of pension age and is receiving any amount of Council Tax Support at the time they apply will also be eligible for an award.

A Council Taxpayer living in a property in Council Tax bands E, F, G and H will be considered to be receiving a 100% Council Tax Support if they are receiving the maximum amount of Council Tax that may be awarded for a property in that band under the Council's Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme (i.e. they qualify for an award equal to 82% of their Council Tax liability).

Where a Council Taxpayer does not receive 100% discount because there is a non-dependant living in the property the household will not qualify for a grant.

Persons Jointly and Severally Liable to Pay Council Tax

Where more than one person is liable to pay the Council Tax only one grant will be awarded to the household. It shall be at the Council's discretion to determine to which of the jointly liable persons the grant is paid.

C. Persons who are not Liable for the Council Tax

Certain categories of persons who are not liable for Council Tax will be eligible for a grant.

These are persons who would be entitled to 100% Council Tax Support if they were liable for Council Tax, and are not liable because:

- They live in shared accommodation and the landlord is the liable person; or
- They are exempt from paying Council Tax under exemption classes O, P S, U or W; or
- Their sole or main residence is in a commercial property (e.g. a guest house or hotel); or
- Persons ineligible for public funds who have a genuine care need that does not arise solely from destitution.

And;

- Students who live in a property that is exempt from Council Tax under class N and who receive the full rate Maintenance Loan or maximum rate final year Maintenance Loan.

Students living in halls of residence will not be eligible.

Persons living in residential care homes where their food and utility costs are included in the overall cost of their care and accommodation will not be eligible (this is because their contribution to these costs is determined by a financial assessment).

5. Requirement to meet Government Eligibility Criteria

- 5.1 All grants are paid on the basis that the person meets any criteria set out in the Government Guidance. In the event that is if found a person does not meet the criteria the Council may refuse the grant or seek repayment if a grant has already been paid.

6. Requirements for Applications

- 6.1 No applications will be required in respect of school holiday meals vouchers.
- 6.2 Applications will be required for other awards before any payment will be made. However, where a person qualified for a Household Support Grant in 2021/22 and meets the eligibility criteria set out in these guidelines, an award will be paid without requiring a further application.
- 6.3 Persons qualifying on the grounds that they receive Council Tax Support will simply need to provide their name and address and details of the bank account to which the payment should be made, and to confirm the purpose for which a grant is requested
- 6.4 Persons who are not liable to pay Council Tax will also need to provide details of their income and certain types of expenditure.
- 6.5 It is expected that applications will be submitted via the Council's on-line application form unless there are exceptional circumstances.
- 6.6 Support will be offered to any applicant who is genuinely unable to complete an on-line application form (e.g. because of disability or because they do not have access to a device on which the claim may be made).

7. Deadline for Applications

- 7.1 The deadline for applications will be 31 July 2022, however, the Council may accept late applications at its discretion where it is satisfied that there is good cause for the late application. Application will not be accept beyond the date at which it is feasible to assess the application and make a payment before any deadlines imposed by the Government.

8. Timing and Method of Payment of Grants

- 8.1 School holiday meals vouchers will be distributed by schools in advance of each holiday period.
- 8.2 Other grants will be paid as soon as is practicable once the application is received. Payment will be made by BACS to the applicant's bank account.
- 8.3 In the event an applicant does not have a bank account a grant may be made by way of a voucher.

9. Calculation of Grant

9.1 The amount of the grant is;

- i. School holiday meals vouchers; £15 per week of holiday per child
- ii. Pensioners entitled to 100% Council Tax Support; £175
- iii. Pensioners entitled to less than 100% Council Tax Support; £75
- iv. Working-age households entitled to 100% Council Tax Support; £50

- 9.2 In very exceptional circumstances an award may be made for a higher amount up to £200 where it considered that it is essential for the household's health and wellbeing and subject to the award meeting the Government's criteria. Such awards will be solely at the Council's discretion and the Council shall make such enquiries as it considers necessary to determine whether an award is made.
- 9.3 Where an applicant requests help with the cost of both food and energy and water the award will be apportioned as 50% toward the cost of food and 50% towards the cost of energy and water.
- 9.4 In the event that available funding is not fully distributed once all applications received by the deadline have been determined, the remaining funding will be distributed to those persons who have qualified for a grant, pro rata to the original award. Awards made in respect of both food and energy and water will be apportioned in the same ratio as for the initial award.
- 9.5 In the event this additional payment would be less than £5.00 per person, the Council may instead award the funding to one or more charitable organisation to be used for the purposes of proving support to vulnerable households who would otherwise struggle to buy food or pay essential utility bills or meet other essential living costs.

10. Exceptions to these Guidelines

- 10.1 There will be no exceptions to these guidelines. However, persons in need of assistance not meeting the criteria set out in these guidelines may make an application to Council's Local Welfare Provision Crisis Grant scheme.

11. Finality of Decisions

- 11.1 Decisions made under these Guidelines shall be at the sole discretion of the Council.

12. Termination of the Scheme

- 12.1 The Council may close the Scheme immediately that the full amount of funding available has been exhausted. Therefore, it cannot be guaranteed that all applications received before the deadline will receive grant.

13. Misrepresentation or Fraud

- 13.1 The Council requires all applicants to provide complete and truthful information and to disclose all information that may be relevant to an award including any subsequent changes of circumstance. In the event of deliberate misrepresentation or fraud the Council will take action in accordance with its Anti-Fraud Strategy which may include prosecution for criminal offences.