

Slough Borough Council Household Support Fund Policy

Introduction

On 30 September 2021, the Department for Work and Pensions (“DWP”) announced £500m of new funding for authorities across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland to distribute to vulnerable households over winter. This is known as the Household Support Fund (“the Grant”).

The funding has been provided by the DWP to local authorities under s.31 of the Local Government Act 2003. Local Authorities have discretion on how the funding will be used, subject to compliance with the Household Support Fund: - Guidance for County Councils and Unitary Authorities in England (“the Guidance”). This Guidance confirms that this expectation is that the Grant should primarily be used to support households in the most need with food, energy and water bills. It can also be used to support households with essential costs related to those items and with wider essential costs.

Eligibility Criteria

The Grant is limited to applications covering the funding period from 6 October 2021 to 31 March 2022. Funds must have been spent or committed before 31 March 2022 and cannot be used for future commitments.

Applications must be made by a household currently living within the Borough of Slough.

Table 1 sets out additional eligibility criteria.

Table 1: Housing Support Fund Principles and Conditions

Condition / Principle	Guidance	Criteria
Households with Children	At least 50% of the total funding must be spent on families with children. These households do not have be in receipt of DWP welfare benefits	<p>This means a household with:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) a person who will be under the age of 19 as at 31st March 2022, <u>or</u> 2) a person aged 19 or over in respect of whom a child-related benefit is paid or free school meals are provided during the period 06 October 2021 and 31 March 2022.
Essential Living Costs	The HSF should primarily be used to support households in most need with eligible spend for essential living costs	<p>These costs should include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3) Food, either through vouchers or cash. 4) Energy for domestic heating, cooking or lighting, including oil or portable gas cylinders. 5) Water bills for drinking, washing, cooking, and sanitary purposes and sewerage. 6) Essentials linked to the above, in recognition that costs may arise which directly affect a household's ability to afford or access food, energy and water. e.g: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. Sanitary products ii. Warm clothing iii. Soap, iv. Blankets v. Boiler service/repair, vi. Purchase of equipment including fridges, freezers, ovens, etc.
Associated Living Costs	The HSF can also be used to support households with certain other essential costs	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 7) Wider essential costs not linked to energy and water. These may include, but are not limited to: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. Support with other bills including broadband or phone bills, ii. Other clothing iii. Essential transport-related costs such as repairing a car, buying a bicycle or paying for fuel. iv. Council Tax arrears

Other	The HSF can be used for other means of support not covered by the above	<p>8) Housing costs, in exceptional cases of genuine emergency where existing welfare and support i.e. the housing cost element of Universal Credit (UC), Housing Benefit (HB) or Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) do not meet this exceptional need, the HSF can be used to support housing costs but not mortgage payments.</p> <p>9) Support to individuals with No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF), funding can be provided, regardless of immigration status, if there is a genuine care need that does not arise solely from destitution, for example if:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. there are community care needs ii. they have serious health problems iii. there is a risk to a child's wellbeing
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Funding for households with children

Table 2 provides the proposed funding levels for households with children

Table 2: Proposed Funding for Households with Children

Category	Estimated No of Households	Proposed Funding per Household	Provisional Allocation of Funding (£)
Families with Children in receipt of Free School Meals (FSM):			
Christmas 2021(2 weeks)	5000	£15 per week per household	£150,000
February 2022 Half-Term (1 week)	5000	£15 per week per household	£75,000
End of March 2022 (2 weeks)	5000	£15 per week per household	£150,000
Care Leavers	900	£100 per Household	£90,000
Families with Early Year's Children	800	£50 per Household	£40,000
Contingency funding for category			£83,846
Total			£588,845.77

Out of the 50% of funding reserved for households with children, £0.084m is to be held to fund claims for support from residents in the borough with children who approach the Council directly, subject to the following conditions:

- i. Such claimants cannot be in receipt of a funding under the other criteria set out above.
- ii. The claimant must reside in the Borough and in the same household as a child as per the definition in table 1
- iii. The claimant must be the parent, legal guardian or carer for a child in the household.

If the conditions are met, the Council will award £50 per claim to fund a maximum of 1,676 claims.

Funding for households without children

The Council estimates that there currently 9,992 households in receipt of Council Tax Support and a further 1,000 tenants in temporary accommodation within Houses of Multiple Occupation (HMO). The total available funding to households without children (and after a deduction for administrations costs) is £0.546m.

To support these households, it is proposed to proactively award £40 per household with discretion on how best to use funding to pay for food, energy and utility costs or to contribute toward eligible associated costs as set out in table 1. This would be estimated to cost £0.437m.

This payment would generally be made either to the household's Council Tax account in lieu of a cash payment or rent account (where the person lives in accommodation that is managed by the council and has utility charges included).

Of the £0.546m of funding, it is proposed to be hold £0.109m of funding as a contingency to fund claims for support from residents in the borough not in receipt of Council Tax Support or Housing Benefits living within HMO, subject to the following conditions:

- i. Such claimants cannot be in receipt of funding under the other criteria set out above.

If the conditions are met, the Council will award £40 per claim to fund a maximum of 2,731 claims.

Non-eligible spend

Eligible spend does not include the following:

- Advice services such as debt advice
- Mortgage costs.

Backdating

Applications will be accepted for funding that has already been occurred, subject to the application being made with 28 days of the commitment (56 days where the funding relates to a commitment from 6 to 31 October 2021). The funding period must fall within the period 6 October 2021 to 31 March 2022.

Multiple Claims

Applications are limited to one application per household.

Third-party applications

Applicants can apply on behalf of someone else, however the funding must be provided to a bank account in the name of the person for whom the application is being made. Funding can be provided to third party organisations to distribute on the basis the organisation administers the Grant in accordance with this policy and contracts to provide monitoring information to the Council.

Third party organisations are limited to the following:

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

Application Process

The Council reserves the right to contact potential applicants directly where they clearly meet the eligibility criteria. The Council will also consider applications from individual households. The application process will be set out on the Council's website.

Determination of applications

Determination will be made by an officer of Group Manager level or above, following consideration by a review panel.

Appeals

There will be no right of appeal against a decision not to award a payment. If an applicant does not supply the necessary supporting documentation, they will be given a single opportunity to provide this information, before the application is refused.

Policy review

The policy will be subject to periodic review by the Executive Director of Corporate Operations or his authorised officer.

Combatting fraud

In order to ensure that applications for funding are not subject to abuse, all submitted applications will require a statutory declaration of truth, a statement regarding data processing and a recovery of funds statement. This declaration allows for the Council, through its corporate anti-fraud team, to carry out post payment checks in order to give greater assurance that the funds were claimed correctly. The declaration will carry a warning that allows the Council to consider taking criminal action against persons who have been found to have deliberately made false applications for the funding. It also allows for the recovery of funds which have been paid based on false or inaccurate information.

The award

It is intended that all applications will be processed within five working days of receipt of all required evidence and payments will be made via BACS only, unless the funding is provided via non-monetary means such as vouchers. Successful applicants should expect to receive the funds within seven working days of the fully completed application.

As funding is limited, any award will be on a first come first served basis. The Council cannot commit to further funding applications once all available funding has been allocated.

Policy approval: 15 November 2021