

Household Support Fund (phase three) Bracknell Forest eligibility framework and approach

1. Background

- 1.1. The council has been allocated a further £555,468.03 of funding from DWP to help support vulnerable households facing a rise in energy bills and the cost of living. The money is available to the council from the 1 October 2022 and must be spent by 31 March 2023. Local authorities have discretion on exactly how the funding is spent within the scope set out in the guidance. Authorities can deliver the scheme through a variety of routes including, through direct provision of food, delivering vouchers to households or issuing grants to third parties. The funding can cover reasonable administration costs.
- 1.2. The funding should be used to support vulnerable households most in need, particularly those who may not be eligible for the other support government has recently made available but who are nevertheless in need. The fund should primarily be used for immediate food, energy, and water related costs. Energy costs are recognised to be a priority. The framework set out in this paper will enable distribution of the grant to best support local households.

2. Local Household Support Fund (phase three)

- 2.1. The funding will be distributed to the following groups, with full eligibility details provided in section three:
 - 2.1.1. Purchase supermarket vouchers to provide winter support in December and February to **free school meal (FSM) eligible children** in reception to year 11 inclusive, attending a Bracknell Forest school. The vouchers will be provided automatically through the schools. Approximately 2,400 children are eligible under this criteria. A £30 voucher will be provided in December and a £15 voucher will be provided in February.
 - 2.1.2. Purchase supermarket vouchers to distribute to low-income working age households receiving **income based council tax reduction or housing benefit but not the benefits**, such as universal credit, which would qualify them for the £650 national cost of living payment. Each household would automatically be provided with £300 of supermarket vouchers before Christmas. This aims to reach approximately 400 households.
 - 2.1.3. Purchase supermarket vouchers to distribute to low-income pension age households receiving **income based council tax reduction or housing benefit but not Pension Credit**, which would qualify them for the £650 national cost of living payment. Each household would automatically be provided with £150 of supermarket vouchers before Christmas. This aims to reach approximately 600 households.
 - 2.1.4. Offer the **local foodbanks** additional funding, including to provide fuel vouchers and fresh food. The two foodbanks operating in the borough will mean more households can receive high quality food support. Households can request a referral for direct fresh food provision through the Bracknell Forest Welfare team (LWP@bracknell-forest.gov.uk; 01344 351408) or through partner organisations such as Citizens Advice and local housing associations. Bracknell

Foodbank is also able to provide fuel vouchers in partnership with Citizen's Advice.

- 2.1.5. Enhancing the **Local Welfare Scheme** (LWS) provision, enabling applications from households in hardship who would not otherwise automatically qualify for support. This aims to reach households who were previously just about managing and may not be qualifying for wider support. It also means a wider cohort such as FSM equivalent under-fives, electively home educated pupils, 16+ pupils, and SEND children attending out of borough schools can apply for an equivalent voucher.
- 2.2. Vouchers for all cohorts outlined in 2.1.1, 2.1.2 and 2.1.3, and additional vouchers distributed through the LWS will be purchased through the existing contract with Blackhawk Incentives. This is permitted under the maximum contract spend of £1.8million until December 2024 which was agreed at Executive, dated 16 November 2021.
- 2.3. It is anticipated, based on the previous distribution of supermarket vouchers, that approximately 10% of the supermarket vouchers will be unredeemed (approximately £41,000). In this scenario, the credit is refunded and can be used to purchase further vouchers. This credit will be used to further support applications through the Local Welfare Scheme, within the grant period.

3. Eligibility

- 3.1. Eligibility for automatic Free School Meal cohort supermarket voucher
A family will be eligible if:
 - Their child attends a school in Bracknell Forest, AND
 - Is registered for Free School Meals during term time, AND
 - Is in reception to year 11 inclusive.
- 3.2. Eligibility for automatic working age supermarket voucher
A household will be eligible if:
 - They are a permanent resident of Bracknell Forest, AND
 - Receive one of the following from Bracknell Forest Council:
 - In receipt of a working age income-based council tax reduction, AND/OR
 - In receipt of working age housing benefit, AND
 - Are not eligible for Universal Credit, tax credits, employment support allowance (income based), or, income support
 - Meet this eligibility criteria on 31 October 2022.
- 3.3. Eligibility for automatic pension age supermarket voucher
A household will be eligible if:
 - They are a permanent resident of Bracknell Forest, AND
 - Receive one of the following from Bracknell Forest Council:
 - In receipt of a pension age income-based council tax reduction, AND/OR
 - In receipt of pension age housing benefit, AND
 - Are not eligible for Pension Credit
 - Meet this eligibility criteria on 31 October 2022.

- 3.4. Local Welfare Scheme application route
The [Local Welfare Scheme \(LWS\)](#) already provides a route where households can apply for one off support. The usual mechanism for application remains in place, operating under the existing policy. Awards made that meet the conditions of the Household Support Fund will be funded through this grant.
- 3.5. All applicants will be assessed through the existing financial assessment process meaning that additional signposting and guidance can be offered for relevant support. Those who received previous support through the Household Support Fund initiatives, will not automatically be eligible for the Local Welfare Scheme. Equally, those who previously had not qualified may now be eligible depending on their circumstances. The assessment process takes into account income and assets for each individual case.
- 3.6. The additional funding provided through the Household Support Fund also means the provisions available through the LWS will be enhanced between the period of 26 October 2022 and 31 March 2023.
- 3.7. A streamlined assessment route for “Winter Family Cost of Living Vouchers” will also be available to the following cohorts to receive a one-off supermarket voucher, to the value of £45 per child. An application must be made to access this support. A household will be eligible if they are:
- Residents of Bracknell Forest, AND
 - In receipt of qualifying benefits, AND
 - Have children who are:
 - Electively Home Educated, AND/OR
 - Aged 16-18 years in full time education, or with an EHCP up to the age of 25 years, AND/OR
 - Under five years old in an early years setting, AND/OR
 - Attending an out of borough school, AND
 - Are not eligible to receive a similar voucher through their school or education authority.
- 3.8. Qualifying benefits are those linked to the [free school meal eligibility](#):
- Income Support
 - income-based Jobseeker’s Allowance
 - income-related Employment and Support Allowance
 - support under Part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999
 - the guaranteed element of Pension Credit
 - Child Tax Credit (provided you’re not also entitled to Working Tax Credit and have an annual gross income of no more than £16,190)
 - Working Tax Credit run-on - paid for 4 weeks after you stop qualifying for Working Tax Credit
 - Universal Credit - if you apply on or after 1 April 2018 your household income must be less than £7,400 a year (after tax and not including any benefits you get)
- 3.9. Repeat applications for the family voucher route, described in 3.6 is not permitted during the grant period (1 October 2022 to 31 March 2023)
- 3.10. The list of eligible households in 3.7 is not exhaustive of those who may receive support, other households will be considered as per the existing LWS policy.

- 3.11. All awards offered under the local welfare scheme route are limited to the available funding. Therefore, the council may close the applications at any point during the period 1 October to 24 March, if the full Household Support Fund grant has been distributed.

4. Wider support

- 4.1. A number of wider government initiatives are reaching many households, including low income families, those with disabilities and those of pension age. The Household Support Fund is finite and cannot automatically be offered to all households and therefore the criteria for distribution is agreed at local authority level to reach as many households in need as possible. Accounting for the wider support households may have already received.

5. Review and Amendments

- 5.1. Should further funding be available to distribute due to unredeemed vouchers or low LWS application numbers, or if further changes to the policy are required, the decision is delegated to the Chief Executive.
- 5.2. The distribution of the funding will be reviewed in early February to forecast the spend and adjust the policy as necessary.
- 5.3. In November 2022, a policy amendment added paragraphs 2.1.3 and 3.3 and amended 2.1.2 and 2.2. This amendment was approved in recognition that the original cohort identified in 2.1.2 was smaller than anticipated.