

Runnymede Borough Council Household Support Fund scheme

Fourth round

Contents

Document control.....	2
Introduction.....	3
Household Support Grant Funding.....	3
Who will benefit from this scheme?.....	4
Definitions.....	4
Eligible spend includes.....	4
Eligibility for applications for food and utility bills.....	5
Eligibility for applications for essentials linked to energy and water, travel, wider essentials and housing costs.....	5
Eligibility for applications for School Uniforms.....	6
Administering the scheme.....	6
Managing the process.....	8
Appeal rights.....	9
How does the Council prevent fraudulent claims for the Scheme?.....	10

Document control

Version 2.1

20/04/2023

- Updated scheme for HSF 4.

Version 2.2

- Introduction: Table of previous rounds, HSF Grant: quarterly instalments, Eligibility for food and fuel: eligible benefits.

Version Autumn

- Revised criteria to include disability benefits, revised eligibility and checks on previous claims

Version Winter

- Changes to eligibility criteria and stricter control on repeat applications.

Introduction

The Government extended the Household Support fund for vulnerable households until March 2024. Previous funding rounds of the Household Support fund are shown in the table below

Household Support Funding round	Period
1	November 2021 – March 2022
2	April 2022 – September 2022
3	October 2022 – March 2023

Vulnerable households across Runnymede will be able to access the Household Support fund to help those who are struggling to afford food, energy and water bills and other essential expenditure due to the global inflationary challenges and the significantly rising cost of living. Payment is made under Section 31 Local Government Finance Act 2003. Runnymede Borough Council has been allocated £326,504 to support families who have been adversely impacted.

Powers granted under the Localism Act 2011, can be used by Runnymede to set up a local scheme for the granting of discretionary relief where such relief would be of benefit to the local community.

Household Support Grant Funding

The Government is asking local authorities to prioritise support for local communities:

- The objective of the Household Support Fund (The Fund) is to provide support to vulnerable households in most need of financial help with the global inflationary challenges and the significantly rising cost of living.
- In terms of type of support, energy bills may be of particular concern to low-income households during the period of the scheme, and Authorities should prioritise supporting households with the cost of energy. The fund can also be used to provide support with food, essentials linked to energy and water, wider essentials.
- This funding covers the period 01 April 2023 to 31 March 2024 inclusive. However, the scheme may end earlier if the fund is spent.
- As the Fund is being distributed by Surrey County Council in instalments each quarter and demand will be at its peak over the winter, the policy will be kept under review and may change.

Borough	Spring & Summer 2023	Autumn & Winter 2023/24	Total funding allocation
Runnymede	May 2023 £32,650 August 2023 £81,626	November 2023 £163,252 January 2024 £48,976	£326,504

Who will benefit from this scheme?

The Fund is intended to cover a wide range of low-income households in need including families with children of all ages, pensioners, unpaid carers, care leavers, and people with disabilities.

Definitions

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 at the time of the award 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 at the time of the award.

The definition of a household with a pensioner is any household containing any person:

- who has reached State Pension age at the time of award

The definition of disability and disabled people aligns with the definition in the Equality Act 2010. Therefore, a disabled person is someone who has a physical or mental impairment that has a 'substantial' and 'long-term' negative effect on their ability to do normal daily activities:

- 'substantial' is more than minor or trivial, for example it takes much longer than it normally would to complete a daily task like getting dressed;
- 'long-term' means 12 months or more, for example a breathing condition that develops as a result of a lung infection.

Eligible spend includes

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

- 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. Eligibility for DHPs must first be considered before emergency housing support is offered, although those 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 etc.
- Eligible spend does not include Mortgage costs

Eligibility for applications for food, energy and water (utility bills)

The Fund is for those residents whose liability for Council Tax is because their sole or main residence at the time of award is within the Runnymede Borough Council area and have been assessed as requiring support with the cost of day to day living or pay bills. and have a household income below £33,000 per year and savings of less than £6,000.

Household income includes all benefits, earnings and pensions.

The following information must be supplied:

- National Insurance number
- latest two consecutive months bank/building society statements for all accounts held in the household. These must clearly show:
 - names
 - all transactions (including income, fuel bills, rent and regular payments where possible)
 - that the household has less than £6,000 in savings.

Where energy or water costs are required, the person applying for the Fund should wherever possible be the individual named on the energy or water bill.

Applications maybe refused where there is no evidence that energy or water bills are being paid.

Eligibility for applications for essentials linked to energy and water, wider essentials and housing costs

Eligibility will be assessed on need by the Benefit Team or our trusted partner organisations, Citizens Advice, Adult Social Care Team and Runnymede Borough Council Housing and Revenues Teams. Eligibility is assessed per household, taking into account household composition income and savings.

A household is defined as the lead claimant, their partner, spouse or civil partner if they have one, any other adults living in the property, and any dependent children.

A claimant will need to demonstrate that they and/or their household are unable to pay energy or water bills, repay priority debts, buy essential items or are otherwise experiencing difficulties, particularly those who cannot increase their income through work, to prevent the escalation of problems.

Support may be provided for those vulnerable households who are ineligible for other government support such as the Cost of Living Payments and the energy support provided for 2023/24 and set out on 17 November 2022:

- Cost of Living Payment
- Energy Price Guarantee

Ukrainian guests will be able to claim help with essentials linked to energy and water, travel expenses and wider essentials where they and/or their household are unable to buy essential items, pay for travel, clothing or mobile phone bills.

Council Tax Support – Self employed

Those in receipt of Council Tax Support (CTS) and are Self-employed are subject to a Minimum Income Floor (MIF) after the first year of trading. Any resident who is no longer entitled to Council Tax support between April 2023 and March 2024, because of the operation of the MIF will be offered a grocery voucher. Those customers affected will be contacted by the Benefit Team, when their CTS ends.

Eligibility for applications for School Uniforms

During the Christmas term break the scheme will be open to residents with children at school, to help with the cost of uniforms, winter clothing and shoes.

The scheme will open 22nd December 2023 and close 21st January 2024.

Criteria:

- The Fund is for those residents whose liability for Council Tax is because their sole or main residence at the time of award is within the Runnymede Borough Council area and have a household income of below £33,000 per year and savings below £6,000.
- £250.00 maximum per household and is a one-off payment during the period 22nd December 2023 to 21st January 2024
- The child must be of school age and attending school
- Payment is in the form of a £50.00 Huggg voucher that can be exchanged at Clarks, Primark, Asda, M&S, Matalan, Sainsbury's, Tesco, ALDI or B&M.
- Application is via GrantApproval application form

Administering the scheme

The Council has a duty to carefully consider every application on its individual merits, considering the relevant circumstances affecting each resident.

The Council and its trusted partners will assess the need based on a completed nomination or GrantApproval application form.

The Council will publicise the scheme through the Council’s website and social media.

Residents will be required to make an application with supporting documentary evidence either to the Council or a trusted partner organisation by 11 March 2024, or sooner if the fund has run out. If the resident is unable to meet any of the criteria, they should clearly explain why.

The level of relief awarded will be capped at £2,000.00 per household to ensure as many people as possible are supported and payment will be by voucher only.

Government guidance proposes that this money is targeted towards recipients who are struggling to afford food, energy bills and other essential expenditure. Given the ambiguity of this criteria, expressing this in a more transparent manner will help potential applicants understand if they will be eligible and what level of award they can expect.

Type of support	Comments
<p>food: The Fund can be used to provide support with food, whether in kind or through vouchers or cash.</p>	<p>£80.00 per household with children £50.00 per household without children</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No more than 1 Huggg Groceries voucher per month
<p>energy and water: The Fund should primarily be used to support 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 water bills including for drinking, washing, cooking, as well as for sanitary purposes and sewerage.</p>	<p>Up to £150.00 for electricity, gas and water arrears.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No more than 1 payment per month up to the amount outstanding on the bill over £10 • Each application must be accompanied by a utility bill dated in the last 30 days and show that any previous payments of the Fund have been used to reduce the arrears. • Those on prepaid meters will be given the amount shown outstanding
<p>essentials linked to energy and water: The Fund can be used to provide support with essentials linked to energy and water (for example warm clothing, blankets), in recognition that a range of costs may arise which directly affect a household’s ability to afford or access energy, food and water.</p>	<p>£80.00 per household with children £50.00 per household without children</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited to 1 Huggg Home essentials or Clothing voucher <p>NB: School Uniform provision £50 School Uniform voucher</p>
<p>White Goods essentials linked to energy and water: The Fund can be used to provide support with essentials linked to energy and water (for example the purchase of equipment such as fridges, freezers,</p>	<p>£350.00 per household</p> <p>Examples: repair or replace fridges, freezers, ovens, slow cookers</p>

<p>ovens, slow cookers), in recognition that a range of costs may arise which directly affect a household's ability to afford or access energy, food and water. In particular, we encourage Authorities to consider supporting households on low incomes to repair or replace white goods and appliances with more energy efficient ones, or to invest in energy efficiency measures which will pay back quickly, such as replacing inefficient white goods. The intention of this is to provide sustainable support which could result in both immediate and long-lasting savings for the household.</p>	
<p>wider essentials. The Fund can be used to support 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, period and hygiene products, essential transport-related costs such as repairing a car, buying a bicycle, or paying for fuel. This list is not exhaustive.</p>	<p>£350.00 maximum per household.</p> <p>Examples: School uniform, winter clothes, work-related support (shoes, coat etc), digital access (phone and/or broadband) or essential transport-related costs.</p>
<p>housing costs. The Fund can be used to support housing costs. However, where eligible, ongoing housing support for rent must be provided through the Housing cost element of UC and HB rather than The Fund. In addition, eligibility for DHPs must first be considered before housing support is offered through The 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). It is expected that the focus of support should be on bills and that support for housing costs should only be given where existing housing support schemes do not meet need. Beyond this, Authorities have discretion to determine the most appropriate Fund for their area, based on their understanding of local need and with due regard to equality considerations.</p>	<p>£2,000.00 maximum per household.</p> <p>Where the property is owned by the Council, the payment will be made direct to the rent account</p>

As the scheme is cash limited, all applications will be dealt with on a first come, first served basis, and when the fund has been spent, no more applications will be paid.

Managing the process

Residents are required to provide to the trusted partner organisation or the council a statement of their circumstances, the reasons for the application plus any such

evidence, documents, receipts, financial statements including bank statements clearly showing their total income and savings and where necessary essential expenditure, the name and bank account details etc. necessary to allow the trusted partner organisation and the Council to make an informed decision. Where insufficient information is provided, despite reminders, then no relief will be granted.

Trusted partners must declare on a relevant household's behalf that they meet all relevant eligibility criteria.

In all cases, the Council will notify the resident of decisions made.

It is envisaged, the trusted partner organisations will be best placed to make grants in respect of Wider Essentials, Housing Costs and Essentials linked to energy and water, such as boiler service/repair, purchase of equipment including fridges, freezers, ovens, etc. While the local authority can deal with Food and Energy and Water.

Where the trusted partner organisations identify a need for Food, Energy and Water and Essentials linked to energy and water, then applications can be made via them and without the restrictions to welfare benefit entitlement, where the trusted partner organisations is satisfied the claimant is in urgent need. Though further checks would be conducted to ensure there is no duplication for the same costs in the same period.

Where an application is successful, the following will be notified to the applicant in writing:

- the amount of The Fund granted and the date on which it will be paid;
- Where relief is not granted then the following information will be provided, again in writing:
- an explanation of the decision within the context of the authority's statutory duty; and an explanation of the appeal rights (see below).
- Powers given to the authority for the granting, varying, reviewing and revocation of The Fund under the Local Government Finance Act 1988, the Local Government and Rating Act 1997, the Local Government Act 2003 and the Localism Act 2011 shall be delegated to the Assistant Chief Executive (Resources) in conjunction with the Corporate Head of Customer, Digital & Collection Services.
- The amount of funding to be provided by the Council in respect of The Fund shall be determined by the Government's funding allocation and is £326,504.

Appeal rights

Whilst there is no formal right of appeal except by judicial review, in the interests of natural justice and to eliminate the risk of administrative error, applicants may seek a review of the decision from the Council.

Where the authority receives a request from a resident for a review of the decision regarding the granting or refusal of discretionary funding grant, the case will be reviewed by the Corporate Head of Customer, Digital & Collection Services.

How does the Council prevent fraudulent claims for the Scheme?

The Council will ensure that all applications are validated by proof of identity, including checking details submitted using our application form with data held by the Council, and for bank accounts where it is necessary to do so.

If you falsely declare your circumstances, provide a false statement or provide false evidence in support of your application, you may have committed an offence under the Fraud Act 2006.

Any actual, potential or perceived conflict of interest must be declared by the referring party. Failure to do so will result in the termination of referrals from the referring organisation and a referral to the Fraud Service.

Runnymede Borough Council has a zero-tolerance approach to fraud and financial irregularity. All suspicions of fraud relating to this scheme will be referred to Surrey Police. In addition to any criminal action, the Council will seek to recover all fraud losses.

If it is subsequently identified that a payment under the Scheme has been awarded as a result of false or fraudulent information, including the claiming of duplicate awards, the Council reserves the right to withdraw the award and recover the resulting sum due.

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