

HOUSEHOLD SUPPORT FUND

Briefing Note – November 2021



Background

On 06 October 2021 the DWP announced a fund of £421 million for local authorities to support those most in need over the winter 'during the final stages of economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic'. Plymouth's allocation of the Household Support Fund is £2,294,796.82

The DWP guidance states that Local Authorities have discretion on exactly how this funding is used within the scope set out in the guidance. The expectation is that it 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. 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

Authorities have the ability to deliver the scheme through a variety of routes including providing vouchers to households, making direct provision of food, or issuing grants to third parties.

The DWP guidance further advises:

- 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 in their area.
- Funds should be spent or committed before 31 March 2022 and cannot be held over for future usage.
- At least 50% of the funding is for vulnerable households with children. The remainder of the funding (up to 50%) is available for vulnerable households without children (including individuals).

During the first phases of the COVID-19 pandemic, over the winter 2020/21, the government funded two similar programmes: the Emergency Food & Essential Supplies Grant and the Winter Grant. In addition, further funding was also received for holiday food for children at Easter and summer 2021.

The following is a summary of the outcomes from these programmes which will inform the implementation of the Household Support Fund:

Emergency Food & Essential Supplies Grant 2020/21

- A food aid co-ordinator was funded and continues to be in place, linking food aid organisations to training, mapping food aid in the city, providing co-ordination of food supply and providing data to the Local Authority.
- The Aid Redistribution Centre (ARC) in Honicknowle was funded as a stop-gap venue for food surplus storage from supermarkets such as the Co-op and Sainsburys, while a FareShares depot is in the process of being set up by December 2021.
- 36 grants worth a total of £140,957 went to a range of smaller and grassroots organisations who distribute food to particularly vulnerable groups.
- Funding went to three projects to support people to increase their incomes and sustainable alternatives such as growing and cooking food: Advice Plymouth, Grow, Share, Cook and the Healthy Start take-up campaign.
- A report into future co-operative models of food supply is due to launch in November 2021.

Winter Grant 2020/21

School Holiday food: PCC purchased and distributed eVoucher codes for schools, Early Years (EY) settings and entitled Further Education (FE) students either on the Free School

Meals Register or considered to be at risk of hardship and food poverty. For Christmas 2020, February half-term and Easter, eVoucher codes to the value of £15.00 per week for each child or young person could be redeemed at Sainsbury's, Tesco, Morrison's, Asda, M&S Food and Waitrose. At PCC request, Aldi was added to the portfolio of supermarkets from February half-term onwards

Other vulnerable groups:

- £8,723 allocated for white goods for the homeless via Community Connections.
- Community Connections and Caring for Carers distributed winter warmth packs to young and adult carers.
- Community Connections distributed food and essentials to Asylum Seekers and Refugees.
- A further £76k was distributed to food aid organisations via a small grants programme.

Energy: Plymouth Energy Community (PEC) distributed £290k worth of support for energy costs as follows:

- Grants for fuel bills
- Prepayment meter vouchers
- Boiler repairs/gas safety checks
- Winter warmth packs - blankets, oil filled radiators etc. for distribution and for partners like the Red Cross, Covid volunteers, Children's Centres.

Impact of COVID and rationale for use of Grant

In June 2021 Devon County Council commissioned some research into food insecurity which included a primary research survey of residents. The research demonstrated that COVID has had a negative impact on the food security status of many households. The main groups at risk are low income households with children, in particular single parents and those with higher numbers of children, and people with mental health issues. This is also the outcome of national research which suggests that this will also be the case in Plymouth. The research recommended that there are creative ways to reduce the feelings of shame associated with needing food aid such as:

- Combining food support with other activities such as a drop-in café
- Emphasize the waste reduction element of food redistribution
- Pre-emptively identifying families through schools before they reach crisis point
- Increasing the extent to which families can choose the contents of their own food parcels
- Encouraging community larders where people can pick up food surplus locally – a 'sharing' culture

We will use this above research in our grant making process as recommended below.

It is difficult to provide people with direct funding towards their water bills as South West Water provide their own support to vulnerable groups, such as reduced tariffs etc. However, it is likely that if people are supported with reducing their fuel bills then this will leave them with additional disposable income to pay for their water. Whilst the Household Support Grant cannot be used for debt advice, Advice Plymouth have been raising awareness within local food aid organisations about their benefits and debt advice services and they work closely with PEC. We can continue to promote these services during this winter for people in water debt.

As has been flagged in the media, there is likely to be a significant increase in energy bills over the next few months. This will particularly affect people when their winter bills arrive in February/March. It is therefore proposed to allocate a significant proportion of funding to this element of the programme.

Household Support Grant Recommendations:

Due to the upcoming October half-term and the urgent need to ensure families with children can access food, it has already been agreed to allocate funding for food vouchers via an Executive Decision signed by the Leader for delivery by Wonde Limited, to a maximum value of £1m for the school holidays. This will cover October half-term, Christmas, February half-term and Easter. The proposal is to purchase eVoucher codes for use in supermarkets to the value of £15 per week per child or young person. We are waiting for confirmation from the DWP that we can purchase eVoucher codes for Easter 2022 as this falls in April, outside of the timescales of the grant, however, indications from a conference call with the DWP are that this will be acceptable. The number of children expected to benefit each week is between 11,000 and 12,000. The food vouchers will be directed to those children on the Free School Meals register or considered to be at risk of hardship and food poverty. The new voucher company have a longer list of supermarkets than previously.

Recommendation for use of Household Support Grant from October 2021 to March 31st 2022 in addition to school holiday food, as follows:

The proposed budget is based on the expenditure from last winter, but with some increases in particular for energy costs. It is also proposed to hold back some funding as a 'contingency' which will enable the position to be reviewed in the New Year and also to respond to any emerging needs. This will also enable a decision to be made on whether or not to fund Community Meals based on the available budget.

- I. To open a grants scheme for Food and other Essential Supplies which will have the following aims:
 - (i) To encourage organisations to consider ways in which they can reduce the stigma that people feel in needing food aid as outlined above.
 - (ii) To increase the capacity of smaller and grassroots organisations to cope with likely increased demand for food aid during the winter as people face increases in the cost of living and fuel bills.
 - (iii) To provide funding to organisations who are able to reach particularly vulnerable groups of people including: the newly unemployed and those applying for Universal Credit, the homeless, frail older people, families with young children on low incomes, people with disabilities, mental health issues and long-term conditions, Refugees, Asylum Seekers with no recourse to public funds and the financially insecure. To also ensure that anchor organisations such as Wellbeing Hubs and Children's Centres can distribute food to local people and families who are struggling. All of this funding will be awarded with agreed outcomes, for example, to increase the opening hours of the food banks and the number of times that people can access support.
 - (iv) To support organisations which are developing self-help approaches to food, in particular growing and cooking food, food clubs, community larders etc.

2. To fund the administration costs of Food Plymouth to provide support to the food grant application process, in particular supporting smaller food aid organisations to apply and providing advice on sustainable models.

3. To fund Plymouth Energy Community to provide support as previously:
 - Grants for fuel bills
 - Prepayment meter vouchers
 - Boiler repairs/gas safety checks

- Winter warmth packs - blankets, oil filled radiators etc. for distribution and for partners like the Red Cross, Covid volunteers, Children's Centres.
4. Carers – Adults and Young Carers
To fund winter warmth and essentials packs as a 'thank you' to adult and young carers and to keep their fuel bills down, to contain for example quilts, pillows, hot water bottles, clothing etc.
 5. Community Connections – Homeless and ASRs
White goods and help with fuel debt to enable people to move on from B&B and temporary accommodation; help with emergency housing costs (rent) within the scope of the grant
 6. Housing costs – there is an element of the fund allocated to this and proposals will be worked up for how this will be used. It is unlikely that it can be used to top-up the Discretionary Housing Payments fund, but could be used for people who are not eligible to apply to that fund who have rent arrears.
 7. Community Meals – to be decided based on available budget

Table 1. Household Support Grant - Breakdown of Funding

All of these budget figures are based on indicative costs and will be flexed up and down depending on emerging need

Element	Funding / £
Purchase of eVouchers for school holiday periods	1,050,000
Food, Essentials, and Wider essentials Grants	208,000
Housing grants (not eligible for DHP)	60,000
Community Connections – care leavers, homeless and ASRs	20,000
Carers	30,000
Plymouth Energy Community	500,000
Community Meals	25,000
Contingency/unallocated	229,500
Administration at 7.5%	172,300
Total	£2,294,800

Appendix I: Grants Scheme

Eligibility

Grants will only go to organisations not to individuals. Grants will be given to constituted groups, Charities and social enterprises who can provide food and essential items to individuals and families in need either through buying, storage or distribution; or who are providing sustainable approaches to food such as growing and cooking food

- a. Open to any organisation that can help to achieve the aims and objectives listed
- b. The organisation will need to be constituted, not for profit and have a bank account

Delivery

- a. Web-page on POD
- b. PCC Email address for information/help
 - i. FAQs
 - ii. Record keeping
- c. Use PCC Firmstep for Grant Application and distribution.
- d. Authorisation panel membership to be decided – will need to include a minimum of Food Plymouth, the Director for Public Health, Families and Children representative, Economic Development Representative to provide business support.

Further information for grant applicants:

- Maximum amount of grant awarded will be £10k, but most grants will be smaller than this.
- The money to be spent by March 2022.
- We expect applicants to demonstrate how this funding will provide additional support to those in need through an expanded service or an increase in numbers. The funding will not pay for current levels of activity.
- Successful applicants will need to keep records, detailing expenditure, evidence of impact and compliance against national grant conditions.