

HOUSEHOLD SUPPORT FUND

Round 2 April to September 2022 Framework



BACKGROUND

In the Spring Statement the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced the continuation of the Household Support Fund from April 2022. The Department for Works and Pensions distributed draft guidance on Friday 1 April 2022. This round of the Household Support Fund runs from 1 April 2022 until 30 September 2022, Plymouth has been allocated £2,294,796.82.

The objective of the Household Support Fund is to provide support to vulnerable households in most need of support to help with significantly rising living costs. Although this is an extension to the original Household Support Fund, it is a new grant subject to its own grant conditions as set out in the Grant Determination letter.

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. Beyond this, Authorities have discretion to determine the most appropriate scheme for their area, based on their understanding of local need and with due regard to equality considerations.

The original HSF required at least a half be used for households with children, this round there is some significant change:

- At least one third of the total funding must be spent on families with children and
- At least one third must be spent on pensioners. In terms of type of support,

The expectation is that the HSF extension should be used in a similar way as the original HSF scheme, with a greater emphasis on supporting households with energy bills. Food and water bills also remain priorities. 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 should develop a 'local eligibility framework and approach' to enable them to distribute grant funding that best supports households most in need. Authorities have the flexibility within the scheme to identify which vulnerable households are in most need of support and apply their own discretion when identifying eligibility. In doing so they should particularly consider households who cannot increase their income through work. Authorities can request applications for support or can proactively identify households who may benefit or can take a mixture of the two approaches. Where Authorities are proactively identifying households they should consider how they can ensure that they are focusing on those in the most need to prevent escalation of problems. There is no requirement for Authorities to undertake a means test or conduct a benefit check unless this specifically forms part of the Authority's local eligibility criteria. Previously

At the moment the figures and guidance are indicative as we await the final guidance. However Authorities need to be ready to deliver support to vulnerable households during the period from 1 April 2022 to 30 September 2022 and are asked to start making immediate preparations to administer the Grant. Funds should be spent or committed before 30 September 2022 and cannot be held over for future usage.

RATIONALE FOR THE USE OF THE HOUSEHOLD SUPPORT FUND 2022

The first round of the Household Support Fund (October 2021 – 21 March 2022) and previous Covid grants have helped inform the proposals in this paper.

In the first round of the Fund, aid was distributed through a variety of routes:

- Free school meal vouchers for the school holidays for children on free school meal vouchers and families on hardship known to the schools
- Front line council teams working with households
- Grants to 3rd sector aid charities including food banks
- Energy aid through Plymouth Energy Community and Citizens Advice Plymouth

These routes proved to be effective in reaching those most in need, the knowledge and experience of partners was invaluable in distributing the aid. The VCS grants were particularly successful in reaching target groups identified in the first round such as carers, young carers, disabled children and adults, older people etc. Although grant holders were not required to collate data on households we know that some grant holders such as Age UK, Plymouth PIE Club and Improving Lives Carers service were targeting older people with their grants.

The need for energy aid ramped up dramatically during the previous HSF grant period, PEC and Citizens Advice Plymouth were allocated extra funds from the grant to support with distributions as PEC were inundated with requests. Foodbanks and other charities were also distributing energy aid through their grant allocations.

This period of the fund covers the June half term and summer school holiday period, The Easter school holiday vouchers (April 2022) are funded through the first round of the fund.

Guidance states “It is for Authorities to decide how payments are made to recipients. However, when making decisions, Authorities should consider the risks involved. Although they still carry fraud risks, vouchers should be used instead of cash where possible as this helps to mitigate the risk of the money being spent by the recipient on things outside of the policy intent.”

This guidance is contrary to the national drive by organisations such as Independent Food Aid Network “*It’s becoming obvious that a charitable food aid response is unsustainable, undignified, and ineffective. News is filtering in of local authorities providing direct cash payments to people struggling to afford essentials rather than distributing vouchers or bolstering food banks.*” Which other areas are seeking to follow.

Authorities should particularly consider how they can support low income households that cannot increase their income through work, such as pensioners, people with disabilities, unpaid carers and parents of very young children in their area.

Ring-fencing

The Department for Works and Pensions has stipulated that at least one third of the total funding will be ring-fenced to support households with children, at least one third of the total funding will be ring fenced to support pensioners with up to one third of the total funding to other households genuinely in need of support. At the briefing sessions DWP were questioned about the 1/3 restriction for households with pensioners, particularly from areas with low pensioner population numbers, the ratio may be revised to reflect local demographics.

The first round of the Household Support Fund was not required not capture data on support for households with pensioners, and therefore have limited intelligence on amount of aid previously distributed to this cohort.

Eligibility

During the first round of the fund funding was used to support households genuinely in need of support and struggling to cope. No restrictions on eligibility were placed around employment status or benefits. This round of the HSF is focussed on the cost of living crisis; it is recognised that the increase in cost of living and fuel crisis is impacting everyone. Our partners who have been supporting with energy aid were inundated with requests for help and are predicting increasing demand. In order to ensure the fund supports those most in need. In feedback from the previous HSF some VCS grant holders expressed challenges around deciding who was eligible for assistance and who was not. It is therefore proposed that a more robust and prescriptive definition for eligibility be developed.

Households with an income of less than £30,000 and/or significantly impacted by the cost of living crisis will be eligible. Support is not restricted by employment status or benefit status.

GRANT

Free School Meal Vouchers

Funding free school meal vouchers for the holidays, will exceed the required minimum of 1/3 of the grant to be spent on households with children. When including energy costs and other essentials this will significantly reduce the amount of funds for other types of households. However it is recognised that this route will have the most impact to support households with children. All households with children eligible for Free School meals will be offered a £13 supermarket voucher per child per for a week of half term and for each of the 6 week summer holiday.

Energy

Grants for energy will be available through Citizens Advice Plymouth, Plymouth Energy Community and Age UK Plymouth. Distributing the bulk of energy support through these organisations will bring significant added values as the beneficiaries will have access to their on-going core offers of support, information and guidance not funded by this grant.

Voluntary Sector

Previous grants have demonstrated the effectiveness of our partners in reaching out to and targeting the households and communities in need. Funds will be distributed by direct grants to charities providing local aid who will use it to support those most in need.

Communication

Details of the support available from this round of the Household Support Fund will be shared through PCC website, Plymouth Online Directory, VCS promotion, Social Media. Details will be shared with Work Coaches at Job Centre Plus and other groups to help point people to support.

Household Support Fund April to September 2022 Expenditure Plan											
	FOOD (£)			ENERGY (£)			ESSENTIALS (£)			Admin (£)	(£)
provision	Children	Pension	Other	Children	Pension	Other	Children	Pension	Other		Totals
FSM V'chers	1,092,000										1,092,000
Age UK		30,000			300,000			30,000		36,000	396,000
PEC				82,440		84,440				21,951	186,831
CA Plymouth				50,000	160,000	40,000				25,000	275,000
VCS Grants	15,000	30,000	5,000		25,000		5,000	40,000	5,000	12,500	137,500
FGCT	5,000	10,000	5,000	5,000	10,000	5,000				4,000	44,000
Imp'ing Lives		15,000			15,000			15,000		4,500	49,500
Foodbanks	5,000	20,000	5,000	4,000	10,000	4,000	5,000	15,000	5,000	7,300	80,300
PCC ADMIN										15,500	15,500
Pie Club Meal		10,000								1,000	11,000
Totals	1,117,000	115,000	15,000	141,440	520,000	131,440	10,000	100,000	10,000	127,751	2,287,631
Unallocated											7,165.82

Children	£ 1,268,440.00	59%
OAP	£ 735,000.00	34%
Other	£ 156,440.00	7%
unallocated	£ 7,165.82	
Admin	£ 127,751.00	
Total	£ 2,294,796.82	

FOOD	£ 1,247,000.00	58%
ENERGY	£ 792,880.00	37%
ESSENTIALS	£ 120,000.00	6%
unallocated	£ 7,165.82	
Admin	£ 127,751.00	
Total	£ 2,294,796.82	

