

HOUSEHOLD SUPPORT FUND FRAMEWORK

Round 3: October 2022 to March 2023



I. BACKGROUND

On 26 May 2022, the Chancellor announced that the Household Support Fund (HSF) would be extended from 01 October 2022 to 31 March 2023. The draft launch letter for the scheme was sent to Local Authorities on August 26th, however, Local Authorities were only notified of the proposed funding allocation on the 22nd September and will be £2,294,796.82 for Plymouth. Final guidance including the confirmed funding allocation was received on 30th September 2022.

There have been a number of changes to the guidance compared with previous schemes. The first, is that there will be no ring-fence of any proportion of funding for any particular cohort of people. Also amongst the changes is a requirement for all Authorities to operate at least part of their scheme on an application (i.e. self-referral) basis i.e. residents should have the opportunity to come forward to ask for support.

There is also an expectation that the fund should be used to support households in the most need – particularly those who may not be eligible for the other support government has recently made available, including the Cost of Living Payments set out on 26 May 2022 and the energy support detailed on 29 July, but who are nevertheless in need.

The final guidance received on 30th September includes a new paragraph stating that Authorities should also consider providing support to disabled people in their area. Disabled people in particular may be facing acute challenges due to the disproportionate impact that rising costs bring for the additional services they need in order to manage their conditions, remain independent and avoid becoming socially isolated. For example, some disabled people may have increased utility bills due to the usage of equipment, aids or adaptations associated with their disability. They may also have additional heating, water or transport costs. Authorities are therefore encouraged to explore ways in which this group may be supported.

It is important to stress that 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. Another vulnerable group will be the working poor who may be unfamiliar with financial difficulty and/or with the benefits system. Whilst Local Authorities can support any group in need, there will be management reporting to the DWP which includes a breakdown of funding to the following groups: families with children, pensioners, and people with disabilities and ‘others’.

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, and housing costs in exceptional cases of genuine emergency, all of which is the same as rounds 1 and 2 of HSF.

2. RATIONALE FOR THE USE OF THE HOUSEHOLD SUPPORT FUND ROUND 3

2.1 Experience of Rounds 1 & 2

The first two rounds of the Household Support Fund have helped inform the proposals in this paper.

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

- Food vouchers for the school holidays for children eligible for free school meals and other families in hardship known to schools
- Front line council teams working with households, e.g children’s social care, Community Connections

- Grants to VCSE organisations such as Improving Lives Plymouth for carers support; and food banks/food organisations of all types
- Energy aid through Plymouth Energy Community (PEC) and Citizens Advice Plymouth
- In round 2, Age UK provided support to people of pension age as there was a requirement to provide 33% of the fund to this group (people aged 66+)

Lessons Learned from Rounds 1 & 2

- Providers distributing large volumes of aid consumed a lot of staff time; for example, PEC had to scale down their offer in round 2 due to the pressure that round 1 put on staffing
- The increasing levels of demand for help with energy costs proved challenging, funding ran out early for many organisations, particularly for non-pensioner groups; this may disadvantage people who don't traditionally come forward such as people with mental ill-health or isolation
- Many providers struggled with distributing aid for energy bills, with difficulties in making payments via energy accounts; alternative funding mechanisms should be considered such as cash or post office vouchers
- Single people sometimes appear to be left out, particularly as in rounds 1 & 2 the funding was focussed on families with children and pensioners in particular
- Some smaller grant holders reported concerns about decision making around eligibility; for example, people demanding support because their neighbour got a voucher.
- There was an online grant application process for the smaller organisations in order to receive funding so there was no control over which organisations applied and some struggled to spend their funding. This suggests funding didn't necessarily match need. The criteria for distributing grants could be tightened up and made clearer. In addition a more integrated approach to food support through a Food Alliance is being explored which would take a more structured approach to referrals
- Some of the food aid charities / organisations run out of funding and food supplies at the end of each HSF round, which suggests there is an element of unsustainability in the food aid sector. A more sustainable model of food support is needed but this will take time to put in place
- Linking people to debt and benefit advice through PEC & Citizens Advice helps to ensure people get holistic and sustainable support, with signposting through Food Plymouth / PFAN
- Larger VCSE organisations liked having the practical help to offer alongside their other advice services

2.2 Evidence of population groups most in need

(i) Research into food insecurity in Plymouth

During December 2021 and January 2022 [as the pandemic was tailing-off and before the Cost of Living Crisis / Challenge], Transform Research investigated food insecurity in Plymouth including the impact of the pandemic on levels of food insecurity.

Pre-pandemic, most UK households were food secure, with high (87%) or marginal (6%) security. Only a minority were food insecure, with low (4%) or very low food security (4%). However, this research has found significantly higher numbers of households in the low (8%) and very low (12%) food security categories in Plymouth. While the finding that 20% of Plymouth households are food insecure (either with very low or low security) is clearly of great concern, the research found that levels of insecurity were even higher in some types of households. Specifically, the impact of the pandemic on food security had been most severe in households with:

- Income below £20,000 pa:
- 1+ person with mental health condition:
- Children present: and/or
- Single adult households.

Reflecting the diverse levels of deprivation and prosperity in the city, significant differences in food security were found in different areas of Plymouth. A quarter of households in the Western & Waterfront wards were currently food insecure (27%). Those in social housing or private rented accommodation are also much more likely to be food insecure than those people with mortgages.

Households with children/young people were significantly more likely to be experiencing food insecurity (28%) than those without (16%). Nearly half of lone adult households with children/young people said that they were experiencing insecurity (45%), making them among the most likely of all groups to need food support. In addition, those households with more children/young people were significantly more likely to be experiencing food insecurity: half (50%) of those with 3+ children/young people compared with a quarter (24%) of those with 1 or 2 and just one in six (16%) of those without any

There is a direct correlation between higher household income and greater food security. Over two fifths of Plymouth households with annual income under £16,190 were experiencing food insecurity (42%), as were over a quarter of those with income between £16,191 and £19,999 (28%). These compared with just 9% of those households with income of £40,000+ and 10% of those with income between £20,000 and £39,999.

Households with at least one person with a health condition (28%) were more likely to be experiencing food insecurity than those households without anyone with a condition (11%). There were very significant differences between the likelihood of the household experiencing food insecurity, in terms of whether the health condition was physical or mental. Nearly half of household with at least one person with a mental health condition (46%) were experiencing food insecurity, compared with 12% of those households with at least one person experiencing a physical health condition

(ii) Groups not qualifying for government cost of living payments

In May the government announced additional support for people to cope with increased living costs. This includes:

- A £650 payment for people in receipt of some benefits (including Universal Credit)
- A £300 payment for pensioners who receive the winter fuel payment
- A £150 payment for people in receipt of disability benefits

The draft guidance suggests that local authorities should focus funding on those people who will not receive one or more of the above payments but who will still struggle to pay bills. The full guidance for HSF round 3 (when received) will give further indication of these groups. Citizens Advice suggest these are likely to be:

- People where the energy costs are included in their rent, e.g. some people in houses of multiple occupation, some of whom may be students
- Households (Single or Families) that are on low incomes but don't qualify for benefits
- People who work full time but who are off sick and not eligible for support
- People who have 'no recourse to public funds'
- Self employed

(iii) Homelessness

A recent report presented to the Local Care Partnership outlined:

- Plymouth has an increasing number of households approaching the Council as homeless or with concerns about the security of their home;
- Included in the above, there has been an increase in the number of working households presenting as at risk of homelessness or homeless;
- There are more households than ever before in temporary accommodation including bed and breakfast;
- Households are in temporary accommodation for longer periods of time;

2.2 Eligibility

The above data and the fund guidance demonstrate that the focus of the funding should be:

- Families with children on low incomes, including single parent households
- Single adults on low incomes, in particular those living in private rented/ HMOs
- People with physical disabilities and serious mental illness on low incomes
- People at risk of homelessness or in temporary accommodation
- People on low incomes who are not able to receive/ eligible for cost of living payments;

3. GRANT PROPOSALS

3.1 Overview

Clearly a focus of this round of HSF is help with energy costs, and support with energy will be via our partner organisations, e.g. PEC, Citizens Advice and Community Connections. In terms of food support, during the COVID-19 emergency, when access to food was a real issue for many, funding has been spent on providing increasing levels of food aid/ food support. However, some of the smaller food aid organisations have cycles of running out of food and funding. This suggests that the food aid sector has become somewhat inflated and is not wholly sustainable. Across the country, infrastructure organisations with a food aid dimension have been involved in a complex transition from what was expected to be peak need during the COVID pandemic which is now running into new uncertainty because of the Cost of Living Crisis / Challenge.

The long-term aim should be to develop a system whereby food aid is available in an emergency only and a more sustainable and strategic system of food support is developed that is wrapped around with other support and advice. The Council is working with Food Plymouth and other partners to roll out a package of community resilience measures to move the city in this direction. For example, work is being undertaken on a 'Food Alliance' which would focus on food clubs and pantries rather than food banks and be a centralised system of referrals, supported by FareShare food supply and with access to holistic support and advice on finance and energy etc. Other developments in the pipeline are a social supermarket (bulk buying food co-op) and a worker setting up food co-ops at neighbourhood level.

The proposal for round 3 of HSF is therefore to use the food element to provide funding to organisations that will help them to transition away from providing solely food aid, but with an element of crisis support still to be available. There will also be more emphasis on a Cash First approach and other forms of support from the larger VCSE organisations. The aim of a Cash First approach is to reduce the need for emergency food aid by helping people access any existing financial entitlements and advice on income maximisation and debt advice; supporting people to improve skills and access employment; as well as providing cash directly to people where possible.

3.2 Detailed proposals

3.2.1 Free School Meal Eligible Children/ Families in Hardship – School Holiday Vouchers

The provision of food vouchers/ funding for FSM children during the school holidays was started by government as part of the COVID-19 emergency response and continued in Plymouth during rounds 1 & 2 of the HSF. Given the short notice of the HSF funding allocation for round 3, an Urgent Decision has been signed-off to award food vouchers to these families for October half-term, Christmas, February half-term and Easter holidays. This will be to the value of £13 per child per week. In the longer term the aim would be to transition away from food vouchers towards a 'cash first' approach with these families in future so that they can spend the money on the most important priority for them, whether that's food, energy or other essentials.

3.2.2 Energy

PEC and Citizens Advice Plymouth will provide help towards energy bills - prepay and credit grants for families and others, including people with disabilities. They will also help with other essentials and with plumbing and heating repairs or replacement, goods such as electric blankets, slow cookers,

microwaves and white goods. PEC take referrals but Citizens Advice work on a drop-in basis which fulfils our obligation to have a self-referral/ application process as part of Round 3

3.2.3 Voluntary Sector support

Direct funding to Voluntary Sector organisations that support people in the target groups for HSF – e.g. Improving Lives Plymouth support carers, people with disabilities and serious mental illness; PATH and asylum seeker/ refugee groups support single people and people with no recourse to public funds; Pause supports particularly vulnerable parents; and Barnardos supports young carers.

3.2.4 Food Support

To work with the emerging Food Alliance on a food supply model that will be sustainable beyond the HSF funding. Some grant funding would be available, distributed to organisations that are able to move away from aid (except in an emergency) and towards for example, community larders in which users pay a small contribution for the food, where there may also be an element of advice and support such as recipe cards and cookery lessons.

3.2.5 Warm Spaces

A fund to provide ‘warm spaces’ would be included once there is a full picture about what is already available to ensure the city is covered geographically. There would be a minimum specification for a warm space to promote an element of ‘self-help’, e.g. food and refreshments on a ‘pay forward’ or donation basis, or community cooking and sharing of food. The warm spaces would also provide pop-up financial and energy advice and other support such as homework spaces.

3.2.6 Children’s Social Care

Funding to support extremely vulnerable families and care leavers.

3.2.7 Community Connections

Funding to people at risk of homelessness or in temporary accommodation for:

- food and utility bills
- moving costs for moving on from temporary accommodation
- energy saving devices such as slow cookers, microwaves

4. 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 September 2022 to March 2023 Expenditure Plan £2,294,796.82											
	FOOD (£)			ENERGY & WATER (£)			ESSENTIALS (£)			Admin (£)	(£)
Provision	Children	Disabilities/ Pensioners	Other	Children	Disabilities/ Pensioners	Other	Children	Disabilities/ Pensioners	Other		Totals
FSM V'chers	936,000									0	936,000
Childrens Social Care				10000			10000			0	20,000
Community Connections		40,000	40,000		75,000	75,000		35,000	35,000	12,000	312,000
Warm Spaces					30,000	30,000				0	60,000
PEC				120,000	20,000	60,000				40,000	240,000
CA Plymouth				165,000	82,500	27,500				50,000	325,000
Adult Carers					10,000			10,000		2,500	22,500
Young Carers							10,000				10,000
VCSE/ Foodbanks	30,000	30,000	30,000	10,000	40,000	40,000	10,000	10,000	10,000	0	210,000
PCC ADMIN										20,000	20000
Totals											2,155,500
Unallocated											139,296.82*

* The unallocated amount can be used where it is most needed when we review spend in the period after Christmas

Children	£	%
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FOOD	£	%
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OAP	£	%
Other	£	%
unallocated	£	
Admin	£	
Total	£	

ENERGY	£	%
ESSENTIALS	£	%
unallocated	£	
Admin	£	
Total	£	

