

HOUSEHOLD SUPPORT FUND

Round 5 April 2024 to September 2024
Framework



BACKGROUND

In the Spring Budget on March 6th, 2024, the Chancellor explained that he had listened to charities and MPs and decided that access to the fund should be extended.

Jeremy Hunt said: “[The HSF] was set up on a temporary basis and due to conclude at the end of this month. Having listened carefully to representations from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, The Trussell Trust and honourable members... I’ve decided that with the battle against inflation still not over, now is not the time to stop the targeted help it offers.

“We will therefore continue it at current levels for another six months.”

There is therefore an urgent need to agree on a framework for the next 6 months of HSF, in particular to fund food vouchers for children entitled to free school meals in the Easter Holidays which is in 3 weeks’ time.

The implication from the Chancellor’s speech is that there will be the same level of funding that Plymouth City Council has received for the last 4 rounds which will be £2,294,796.82 for six months.

As the Chancellor talked about ‘continuation funding’, it is likely that the objective and criteria for the fund will remain the same or very similar. However, Councils have not received written guidance to this effect, which means that this framework proposal will be high level at this stage.

The objective of the Household Support Fund to date has been to support those most in need with the cost of food, energy and water bills, phone, broadband and clothing and in exceptional cases, housing costs. Beyond this, Authorities have had discretion to determine the most appropriate scheme for their area, based on their understanding of local need and with due regard to equality considerations.

Authorities have previously been required to develop a ‘local eligibility framework and approach’ to enable them to distribute grant funding that best supports households most in need. Authorities have always had the flexibility within the scheme to identify which vulnerable households are in most need of support and apply their own discretion when identifying eligibility.

RATIONALE FOR THE USE OF THE HOUSEHOLD SUPPORT FUND APRIL 2024

In Round 4, from April 1st 2023, to March 31st 2024, HSF could be used as follows:

- To assist households with the costs of:
 - ENERGY - gas/electricity,
 - FOOD - water, food,
 - ESSENTIALS - phone/broadband, essential household items (e.g. white goods, beds/bedding, clothing, baby/sanitary products) and housing costs (in exceptional circumstance) and advice.
 - The fund can be used to provide supplementary advice services to award recipients, including debt and benefit advice, but this should not be the primary function.
- In particular, to consider those groups who may not have benefitted from any of the recent cost of living support.
- No application was needed if households requiring assistance can be determined in advance.
- Every local authority was required, at least in part, to have an application basis grant provision i.e. residents should have the opportunity to come forward to ask for support

- Individuals, regardless of their immigration status were eligible to ensure a basic safety net of support
- The fund could not be used for mortgage related costs.
- The scheme had to be adequately advertised.

In all 4 previous rounds of HSF the fund has been distributed by Plymouth City Council in the following ways:

- Food vouchers for the school holidays for children entitled to free school meals and other families in hardship as identified by the schools.
- Front line council teams working with households, in particular Community Connections
- Grants to 3rd sector aid charities including emergency food providers such as food banks.
- Energy aid and help with other appropriate debts through Plymouth Energy Community and Citizens Advice Plymouth

In addition, in Round 4, funding has been provided to PEC and Citizens Advice Plymouth to provide advice to people receiving funding, in order to maximise incomes and reduce debts in a sustainable way.

These routes proved to be effective in reaching those most in need, the knowledge and experience of partners was invaluable in distributing the fund. The VCS grants were particularly successful in reaching target groups such as carers, young careers, disabled children and adults, older people etc.

This period of the fund covers the Easter, May half term and summer school holiday periods.

In addition to the above, Plymouth City Council now has the 'Low Income Family Tracker' (LIFT) tool as provided by Policy in Practice, which uses Council data to identify households that are struggling financially. There is potential to use this tool to identify households that may be in need and to fund them directly, whilst offering them advice on maximising their income at the same time.

Eligibility

In Round 4, suggested households that could be targeted by Local Authorities were:

- Households with at least one child under 18 who resides in the property on a permanent basis.
- 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 health/mental illness on low incomes
- Households where someone has reached pension age.
- Households with an unpaid carer
- Households with a care leaver
- People at risk of homelessness or in temporary accommodation
- Households who are eligible for children's Free School Meals
- Households with very vulnerable families (Children's Social Care, Refugee organisations, Young Parents service)
- Single homeless and private sector tenant support service

It is likely that this will remain the same or similar and when this is confirmed, the detail of the households that will be eligible will be announced on the Council's website.

GRANT USAGE

Food Vouchers for school holidays for children entitled to free school meals

This has been funded since 2020. 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 and other households who are struggling as identified by the schools, will be offered a £13 supermarket voucher

per child per week for the 2 week Easter Holiday, the week of May half term and the 6 week summer holiday.

The cost of this is approximately: 12516 children X £13 X 9 weeks of school holidays = £1,464,372

The remaining funding of £830,424.82 will be distributed as follows:

(i) Energy

Grants for energy will be available through Citizens Advice Plymouth and Plymouth Energy Community. 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.

(ii) Voluntary Sector and Emergency Food

Previous grants have demonstrated the effectiveness of our partners in reaching out to and targeting the households and communities in need, for example, people with mental ill-health, physical disabilities and their carers. There has also been the need to support the supply of emergency food, particularly during the cost-of-living crisis.

(iii) LIFT Dashboard and Community Connections

Households at risk of homelessness or otherwise in need as identified by the LIFT Dashboard and via Community Connections.

Communication

Details of the support available from this round of the Household Support Fund will be shared through PCC website, VCS promotion and Social Media.