

## **Policy for households with a disabled person relying on high energy medical equipment (Household Support Fund).**

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Owner	Nicola Stroud
Target Audience	Households with a disabled person that uses energy intensive medical equipment in the home and is impacted by cost of living crisis.

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This policy may be reviewed earlier than the Review Date in the event of significant developments requiring changes to the document.

If you would like help to understand this document, or would like it in another format or language, please contact Talk Community, Customer Services on 01432 260027 or email: [householdsupportfund@herefordshire.gov.uk](mailto:householdsupportfund@herefordshire.gov.uk)

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1. Herefordshire Council has been allocated £1,329,601 million from the Department for Work and Pensions to support households in Herefordshire struggling with the cost of living. The current Household Support Fund (HSF) ends on 30 September 2024. The expectation is that it 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 but who are nevertheless struggling due to the increased cost of living.

2. The decision to support households with a disabled person meets the recommended guidance outlined by the DWP.

3. This policy outlines the procedures and eligibility criteria to support household with a disabled person who use energy-intensive medical equipment at home.

## **Eligibility criteria**

4. All clients referred must meet the following criteria:

1. Be a Herefordshire resident over 16 years old, or a member of the armed forces who can demonstrate a strong connection to Herefordshire.
2. Be a legal resident in the UK, not under immigration control.
3. Be a household with a disabled person that uses energy-intensive medical equipment in the home that is experiencing financial hardship that can demonstrate the need for support with energy bills that cannot be met by other sources.

5. The following clients will not be eligible:

- a) A person subject to immigration control by virtue of the Immigration and Asylum Act.
- b) A person in a care home or prison.
- c) Someone in hospital, unless they are about to be discharged.
- d) A person or household who has received up to £500 of financial support from the Household Support Fund from April 2023. (Exceptions may be considered in exceptional circumstances).
- e) A person from abroad who has failed or would fail the habitual residence test for entitlement to welfare benefits.

## **Making a referral**

6. Self-referrals can be submitted through an online referral form on the Herefordshire Council website. A bank statement and evidence of energy-intensive equipment will be required. Bank details must be provided to enable transfer of funds for successful applications.

7. The financial support provided will be a payment of £250.00 per household. The funds will be transferred from Herefordshire council into the recipient's bank account. A second payment can be considered in exceptional circumstances but not within 6 weeks of the first payment being issued.

8. Professionals can make referrals on behalf of someone else by using the online referral form on the Herefordshire Council website. They should enter their contact details and the relationship to the client being referred.

10. As part of the referral form professionals will need to discuss with the client their consent for their information to be shared.

## **Receiving one off voucher payment (for client)**

11. Once the form has been submitted by the referral will be received and processed by Herefordshire Council's Customer Services Team.

13. If the application is successful, bank details will be shared with the Corporate Finance team who will issue the payment.

14. The process from referral to the client receiving the voucher will be completed within a 14 day period.

## **Verification of eligibility**

19. Herefordshire Council has signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) so that the DWP can provide data to the council to help determine a person's eligibility for local welfare provision through the household support fund. This includes information about an applicant's age and any welfare benefit entitlements or pensions they receive.

20. Information to confirm an applicant is a resident of Herefordshire will be obtained by checking council tax records (where applicable). If an applicant is a Herefordshire resident but is not liable for council tax other documents to confirm residency must be provided.

## **Deciding awards**

21. In order to assess the household needs and priorities, the council will receive self – referrals from clients and referrals from professionals who have identified the household are in need of financial support. The referral form must be completed with as much detail as possible including detail of the client's medical condition and the energy intensive medical equipment that they use within their home. This may include details of who is living within the household, the household income, any savings held by household members, and the circumstances and reasons that led to an application being made.

22. Two applications for financial support will be considered in exceptional circumstances, whilst the funding is available in although not within a 6 week period. In the case of repeat applications further work and referrals to other agencies will be discussed with the applicant and may be conditional on having further financial support.

## **Unsuccessful applications**

23. Awards are discretionary, and as such there is no formal right of appeal. An applicant can ask the council to look at the decision again if they disagree with it, if they think something hasn't been taken into account, or if they have new information that they think would be helpful to their application.

24. Requests for a review of the decision must be made in writing within one month of the decision date. It must include the reasons why the applicant is asking for a review.

25. The applicant will be notified of the review decision within 14 days of the request. This decision will be final.

## Monitoring of awards

26. The effectiveness of this policy will be determined by the level of consistency with applications and outcome of awards. The main channels through which this will be established are feedback from decision makers, and contact from applicants and partner organisations.

27. We will monitor this scheme on an ongoing basis to ensure that we are making the best use of the money we have available.

## Equality Duty

28. The public sector equality duty (specific duty) requires us to consider how we can positively contribute to the advancement of equality and good relations, and demonstrate that we are paying 'due regard' in our decision making in the design of policies and in the delivery of services.

29. Local authorities have discretion on exactly how the Housing Support Fund is used within the scope set out in the guidance for April 2024 to September 2024 issued by the Department of Work and Pensions and the local eligibility framework which is set out in paragraph 5 of this report. In prioritising low income households, there is likely to be a positive impact for people who are financially disadvantaged (although this is not in itself a protected characteristic within the Equality Act 2010). If there are households in urgent need due to rising living costs, they may access support through the Local Welfare Provision service of the Council.

## Fraud Prevention

30. Herefordshire Council recognises that it has a duty to protect the public funds it administers and to prevent and detect fraud in all areas of the council's services. If an applicant receives an award from the Household Support Fund by intentionally and dishonestly making a false declaration, or providing false evidence or statements, they may be investigated in line with the Fraud Act 2006 and other relevant legislation.

## Version Log

<i>Version</i>	<i>Status</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Description of Change</i>	<i>Reason For Change</i>	<i>Pages affected</i>
1.0	Final	28/12/2023	Document creation	New policy	All
2.0	Final	19/6/2024	Amendments	Dates and grants awarded updated	3 & 5