

Local Welfare Provision (Household Support Fund) Policy

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Target Audience	People impacted by cost of living crisis, support organisations, Community Wellbeing directorate officers, and social care professionals.

After the Review Date has expired, this document may not be up-to-date. Please contact householdsupportfund@herefordshire.gov.uk to check the status after the Review Date shown above.

This procedure 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

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Introduction and statement of purpose

1. Herefordshire Council has been allocated £2.659 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 31 March 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. Some of this funding must be made available through an application process. The council already operates an application scheme for people requiring support in an emergency through its Local Welfare Provision service.
3. This policy provides the local eligibility framework for emergency support through the HSF to meet crucial needs of a person or household experiencing financial hardship resulting in them struggling to feed themselves or their family, heat their home, or pay for other essential living costs.

Application eligibility criteria

4. Applicants 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 person or household experiencing financial hardship that is able to demonstrate the need for emergency support with essential living costs that cannot be met by other sources.
5. The following applicants 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 have received two awards from the Local Welfare Provision (Household Support Fund) within the last 6 months (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.

How to apply

6. All applicants will be required to make an application by phone 01432 383838, or on-line using the [application form](#) on Herefordshire Council's website.
7. Upon receipt of the application an officer will contact the applicant to gather more information. They may ask for other information or evidence, such as proof of identity, and information about money coming in and money that must be paid out. They will also ask for recent bank transaction statements so that they can see what essential costs the applicant is struggling to pay for.
8. All applications will be treated fairly and consistently. Applications will be processed within 2 - 5 working days, but this may be longer due to demands for the service.

Verification of eligibility

9. 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.
10. 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

11. In order to assess the household needs and priorities, the council will require the applicant to provide information about their needs and circumstances. 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.
12. When assessing the application officers will consider all the information at their disposal to assess the risk faced by the applicant and the priority of their application including:
 - a) Financial circumstances and other available financial support provided
 - b) When the applicant is due to receive their pay, pension or next benefit payment.
 - c) Any health conditions, disabilities, or other circumstances that put the applicant or household at risk.
 - d) Support already provided or available through partner organisations.
 - e) Preventative measures taken by the applicant or others in the household.
 - f) The impact of making or not making an award on the household.
12. If an applicant has a support worker, or has received support through a partner organisation, it can be helpful to ask them to write a letter or send an email confirming the situation, as sometimes they can provide more background information to support the application.

Emergency support provision

13. Eligible applicants will be told how much emergency support they will receive and how they will receive it by the officer dealing with their application. The following funds are available:

Food vouchers

- a) Single household – up to a maximum value of £50.00
- b) Household with children – up to a maximum value of £100.00
- c) Multiple adult household – up to a maximum value of £100.00

Fuel vouchers

- e) Prepayment meter credit – top up for households with minimal or no credit at risk of disconnection due to financial hardship- up to a maximum value of £100

Cash vouchers

- f) Redeemable cash vouchers to purchase LPG/bottled Gas, heating oil, solid fuel, where there is financial hardship and risk of not heating the home – up to a maximum value of £100
14. Two applications for emergency support are allowed every 6 months whilst the funding is available. In exceptional circumstances repeat applications will be considered on merit. 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 (for example, referrals to Citizens Advice or Age UK)

How vouchers will be issued

15. Vouchers will be provided by phone app, e voucher or printed voucher. Information about where and how to redeem the vouchers will be provided to the applicant when they are notified about the award.

Unsuccessful applications

16. 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.
17. 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.
18. The applicant will be notified of the review decision within 14 days of the request. This decision will be final.

Signposting and referral to partner organisations

19. The applicant may be signposted to other help that will enable them to overcome their difficulties. This might include (this is not a full list):
 - Debt advice and help to manage money
 - Help with claiming welfare benefits
 - Keep Herefordshire Warm energy advice
 - Community mental health support
 - Citizens Advice, Age UK
 - Other help
20. A referral to partner organisations who can provide other types of support may also be made with the applicant's consent.

Monitoring of awards

21. 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.

22. 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

23. 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.
24. Local authorities have discretion on exactly how the Housing Support Fund is used within the scope set out in the guidance for April 2023 to March 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

25. 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>
0.01	Draft	18/01/2023	Document creation	New policy	All
1.0	Final			Approved	All
1.1	Final	05/06/2023	HSF Award for 2023/24 Change to voucher limits	Funding 2023/24	3,6 4,5
1.2	Final	19/06/2024	No change		