

Support for families with children 0 to 5 years old (Household Support Fund) Policy

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Target Audience	Families with children 0 - 5 years impacted by cost of living crisis, support organisations/professionals working with families with children 0 - 5 years.

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 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

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Introduction and statement of purpose

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 30th March 2025. 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 families with children between the ages of 0 to 5 years old meets the recommended guidance outlined by the DWP.

3. This policy outlines the procedures and eligibility criteria to support families with children 0 to 5 years old that have been referred on by a specified provider.

4. This policy also outlines the voluntary referral process to Citizens Advice to provide financial health checks to parents in order to ensure they are receiving all entitled benefits and assist with debt management.

Eligibility criteria

5. 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 child under 5 years, experiencing financial hardship that is able to demonstrate the need for support with essential living costs that cannot be met by other sources.

6. 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 (for professional)

7. Families will be identified via referrals through Children's Centres, Health Visitors, Community Nursery Nurse, Nurseries/ Early Years settings, Citizens Advice Bureau, schools, Social Prescribers and Third Party Organisations (that are funded through the HSF). This is to ensure that professionals are best placed to ensure that those most in need are in receipt of the funding.

8. The support provided will be a one of payment of £100 per family these be received via voucher code for a Love2Shop voucher.

9. Professionals should enter their details and those of the client being referred via the following link which is specifically for use of identified professionals ie this is not an open application process: https://my.herefordshire.gov.uk/service/Referral_form_for_families_with_children

10. As part of the referral form professionals will need to discuss with the client their consent for their contact information to be shared with the Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB).

11. Once the voucher details have been sent to the client, Customer Services will inform the referrer that the referral has been processed and will upload the detail to 'Casebook' if the client has consented to advice from the CAB. Please see below section on CAB's inward referrals process.

Receiving one off voucher payment (for client)

12. Once submitted by a professional, the referral will be received and processed by Herefordshire Council's Customer Services Team.

13. Once eligibility is determined, a Love2Shop voucher code will be sent to the clients mobile phone.

14. The client will need to set up an online Love2shop account and choose the supermarket that they would like to redeem the voucher at.

15. The process from referral to the client receiving the voucher will be complete within a 24 hour period.

Referrals to Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB)

16. CAB have a secure referral system, called Casebook, to enable inward referrals i.e. the transfer of information about a client from external partner organisations to Citizens Advice.

17. If a client gives consent for their information to be shared, CAB will make direct contact with the client and are able to offer support on maximising income, welfare benefits and provide assistance with any related matters.

18. Once the client details entered on the online form have passed validation checks, the information is entered into Casebook (Citizens Advice Case Management system) where a new client record is created.

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 referrals from professionals who have identified the family are in need of financial support and they will complete the referral form with brief circumstances that outline the reason for the referral. 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 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, CAB)

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 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

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	Draft	17/10/2023	Document creation	New policy	All
2.0	Draft	23/10/2023	Amendment to document	Procedure incorrect	3 & 4
3.0	Final	17/11/2023	Amendment to document	Referring agencies added	7
4.0	Final	19/6/2024	Amendment to document	Amendment to dates of HSF and referring agencies	1 & 7
5.0	Final	13/11/2024	Amendment to document	Amendment to dates of HSF and payment amount that can be received.	1 & 8