

Folkestone & Hythe District Council Household Support Fund Policy



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1 Background

- 1.1 This document sets out Folkestone & Hythe District Council's ('the Council's') approach to supporting people through the additional funding from the Department for Work and Pension's Household Support Fund.
- 1.2 The Household Support Fund will enable Folkestone & Hythe District Council to provide support to households from 1 September 2024 and covers the period until 31 March 2025.
- 1.3 Local authorities are permitted to allocate funding to support struggling households and encouraged to adopt the following principles:
- use discretion on how to identify and support those most in need, taking into account a wide range of information;
 - use the funding from 1 September 2024 to 31 March 2025 to meet immediate needs and help those who are struggling to afford energy and water bills, food, and other related essentials. Authorities can also use the funding to support households who are struggling to afford wider essentials;
 - in exceptional cases of genuine emergency, the funding can additionally be used to support housing costs where existing housing support schemes do not meet this exceptional need; and
 - work together with District Councils and third parties including, where necessary and appropriate, other local services. This may include social workers, housing and family support services and may incorporate intelligence and data from wider children's social care systems to help identify and support individuals, families and households within the scope of The Fund.
- 1.4 The objectives of the policy will be to:
- To provide support to struggling households recognising the profile and specific needs of residents.
 - To support households and prevent household needs from escalating into crisis.
- 1.5 This Policy will be applied from 11 November 2024 until 31 March 2025. In applying the Policy, the Council will have regard to relevant implementation guidance as issued. Further information regarding this guidance can be found at www.gov.uk/government/publications/household-support-fund-guidance-for-local-councils/household-support-fund-final-guidance-for-county-councils-and-unitary-authorities-in-england
- 1.6 Elements of funding have been ring-fenced by Kent County Council for allocation towards areas of support listed below:
- To support families that receive free school meals during the holidays in the period of the scheme.

- To provide supermarket vouchers to families with children in receipt of benefits-related Free School Meals or families in need of support through Kent Support and Assistance Service (KSAS).
- To support countywide initiatives to support households who need support with energy and water, and essentials linked to energy and water.
- To support KCC services in other areas as decided by KCC.

1.7 Funding received by Folkestone & Hythe District Council will be made available to support households with:

- Those who are struggling to afford food.
- Energy and water bills.
- Essentials linked to energy and water such as sanitary products, warm clothing, soap, blankets and boiler service/repair.
- Help with wider essentials such as bedding.
- Help with housing costs where there is a case of genuine emergency where other funds cannot meet the need.

1.8 For the duration of this period the funding available to Folkestone & Hythe District Council is listed below.

- £205,245.90– To support struggling households in accordance with the wider government guidance

Applications will open from November 2024 and close by 28 February 2025 or earlier if funds are exhausted.

1.9 Mortgage costs are not eligible under this scheme.

1.11 The total expenditure in this period resulting from awards under this scheme will not exceed the value of the funding available.

2 Equalities

2.1 The creation of a Household Support Fund Policy facility meets the Council's obligations under the Equality Act 2010.

2.2 The Council recognises the impact of rising living costs and it's economic consequences on our residents and therefore the importance this policy has in protecting those applicants most in need from financial support.

2.3 Applicants will also be offered further support as applicable via other schemes managed by the Council as well as appropriate signposting to other relevant services if required.

3 Purpose of the Household Support Fund

- 3.1 The objective of the Household Support Fund is to provide support to struggling households where alternative sources of assistance may be unavailable.
- 3.2 All applications will be treated on their individual merits based on the information and supporting evidence provided in conjunction with consideration of the available funds. This may mean that not all applications can be agreed.
- 3.3 An award will usually be a one-off provision to support a household in need and ease the burden faced by a wide range of struggling households across the country worrying about paying the next utility bill or the next food shop. A one off award may be awarded in instalments across the duration the scheme.

The grant will be used with the intention of:

- preventing serious risk to the health, well-being or safety of the area's most financially excluded residents with the greatest need.
 - easing severe financial pressure caused by current economic pressures.
- 3.4 Priority will be given to cases with immediate need and any applications with regards to arrears may be considered separately. Further advice may also be offered such as benefit eligibility and signposting to other agencies as appropriate.

4 Eligibility Criteria

- 4.1 To be eligible for a payment through the Household Support Fund, you must:
- live in Folkestone & Hythe District,
 - be aged 16 or over,
 - be in receipt of benefits or be on a low income (such as minimum wage). Accepted benefits can be found below
 - not have access to any funds that can be relied on to meet the need you are applying for, and where you would be left with insufficient resources which would cause serious risk to your own, or your family's, health, or safety
- 4.2 Accepted benefits to meet criteria are:
- Universal Credit
 - Working Tax Credit/Child Tax Credit
 - Employment and Support Allowance
 - Jobseeker's Allowance
 - Income Support

- Pension Credit
- Housing Benefit
- Council Tax reduction

5 The Household Support Fund process

5.1 An application for an award may be made via a self-referral or via a request from a Council officer, councillor or voluntary or community organisation. An application can be made by completing the Household Support Fund form via the Council's website.

5.2 Applications from people not meeting the minimum eligibility criteria will not be considered.

5.3 In some cases the Council may use information held to make an award in the absence of an application form.

5.4 It is the applicant and referrer's responsibility to ensure that the correct items/services are requested at the time of requesting an award, additional items cannot be added at a later date, except in the situation where there is an unforeseen issue.

5.5 It is the responsibility of the referrer to collate and provide evidence in support of the application. Failure to do so will result in a delay with the application being assessed and a decision could be made in the absence of supporting information which could result in requested items/service not being awarded.

Evidence should be provided electronically via the online Household Support Fund form. If a resident does not have access to the internet support can be offered by contacting the Council or a local community hub.

5.6 The Council may request any other reasonable evidence in support of an application for a Household Support Fund award. The applicant or referrer will be asked to provide the evidence and it must be provided within two weeks of the request although this will be extended in appropriate circumstances.

5.7 The Council reserves the right to verify any information or evidence that the applicant supplies, in appropriate circumstances, with other Council departments, government agencies and external organisations or individuals. We may also use the information for the detection/prevention of fraud.

5.8 If the applicant is unable to or does not provide the required evidence, in the agreed time, we may treat the application as withdrawn by the applicant and we will not be under an obligation to assess it.

5.9 In applying this policy, the decision maker will take into account any alternative funding provision including Discretionary Housing Payments and Financial Support Payments.

- 5.10 The Council may request details of an applicant's household income and expenditure in the process of making a decision.
- 5.11 The possible outcome of an application is to award fully, partially or not at all.
- 5.12 The Council will only normally make one award per part of the scheme (please see Section 1.8) per household.

6 Making an award of Household Support Fund

- 6.1 The Council will decide whether or not to make an award from the Household Support Fund, and how much any award might be. Awards will be given in the form of vouchers where possible. Award amounts will be reasonable based upon household need and not normally more than £100.
- 6.2 An award of Household Support Fund does not guarantee that a further award will be made at a later date, even if the applicant's circumstances have not changed.
- 6.3 The Council will notify the applicant of the outcome of their request on the day the decision is made. This may be by letter, email, SMS (text) or a combination of these methods.
- 6.4 Where the request for an award is unsuccessful or not met in full the Council will explain the reasons why the decision was made.
- 6.5 The Council may, with the applicant's permission, also inform a support worker or advice agency of a decision.
- 6.6 In the absence of being unable to award a direct award for support with fuel payments the Council may award a food voucher in lieu of a fuel award to enable a resident to pay their fuel costs directly.

7 Publicity

- 7.1 The Council will make a copy of this policy available for inspection and will be published on the Council's website.

8. Appeals

- 8.1 Household Support Fund awards are not subject to a statutory appeals process. Appeals will therefore be decided by the Council as part of its normal complaints process.

9. Fraud

- 9.1 The Council is committed to protect public funds and ensure funds are awarded to the people who are rightfully eligible to them.

- 9.2 An applicant who tries to fraudulently claim an award by falsely declaring their circumstances, providing a false statement or evidence in support of their application, may have committed an offence under The Fraud Act 2006.
- 9.3 Where the Council suspects that such a fraud may have been committed, this matter will be investigated as appropriate and may lead to criminal proceedings being instigated.
- 9.4 In the event that it comes to the Council's attention that a grant has been awarded as a result of misleading information, deception or fraud the Council will seek repayment of the monetary value of the grant from the recipient.
- 9.5 Where it comes to the Council's attention that the applicant has received a grant, payment or loan from another source for the same purpose as that for which a grant has been awarded under this policy, the council may seek repayment of the monetary value of the grant.

10. Complaints

- 10.1 The Council's Complaints Procedure (available on the Council's website) will be applied in the event of any complaint received about the application of this policy.

11. Policy agreement and review

- 11.1 This policy will be agreed and reviewed in line with any changes in legislation. Alterations to the policy will be approved by Folkestone & Hythe District Council's Corporate Services Director or Chief Financial Services Officer in consultation with the Cabinet Member responsible for Finance & Governance.

Version 6.0: November 2024