

Runnymede Borough Council Household Support Fund scheme

Sixth round

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Document control

Version 1.0

04/09/2024

- Updated scheme for HSF 6.
- Updated for Hugg appliance items

1. Introduction

The Government extended the Household Support fund for vulnerable households until March 2025. Previous funding rounds of the Household Support fund are shown in the table below

Household Support Funding round	Period
1. £239,582	November 2021 – March 2022
2. £197,170	April 2022 – September 2022
3. £192,562	October 2022 – March 2023
4. £287,528	April 2023 – March 2024
5. £125,668	April 2024 – September 2024

Vulnerable households across Runnymede will be able to access the Household Support fund to help those who are struggling to afford food, energy and water bills and other essential expenditure due to the continuing global inflationary challenges and the significantly rising cost of living. Payment is made under Section 31 Local Government Finance Act 2003. Runnymede Borough Council has been allocated £xxx to support families who have been adversely impacted.

Powers granted under the Localism Act 2011, can be used by Runnymede to set up a local scheme for the granting of discretionary relief where such relief would be of benefit to the local community.

2. Household Support Objectives & Key Principles

The Government is asking local authorities to prioritise support for local communities:

- The objective of the Fund is to provide crisis support to vulnerable households in most need with the cost of essentials and use the funding for the period 1 October 2024 to 31 March 2025 to meet immediate needs and help those who are struggling to afford household essentials including energy and water bills, food, and wider essentials.
- In terms of type of support, energy bills may be of particular concern to low-income households during the period of the scheme, and Authorities should prioritise supporting households with the cost of energy. The fund can also be used to provide support with food, essentials linked to energy and water, wider essentials.
- This funding covers the period 01 October 2024 to 31 March 2025 inclusive. However, the scheme may end earlier if the fund is spent.

- As the Fund is being distributed by Surrey County Council in instalments each quarter and demand will be at its peak over the winter, the policy will be kept under review and may change.

Borough	Spring & Summer 2023	Autumn & Winter 2023/24	Total funding allocation
Runnymede	May 2023 £32,650 August 2023 £81,626	November 2023 £163,252 January 2024 £20,000	£297,528

3. Who will benefit from this scheme?

The Fund is intended to cover a wide range of low-income households in need including families with children of all ages, pensioners, unpaid carers, care leavers, and people with disabilities.

Definitions

For the purpose of this grant (and without prejudice to other schemes):

The definition of a household with a child is a household containing any person:

- who will be under the age of 19 at the time of the award or
- a person aged 19 or over in respect of whom a child-related benefit (for example, Child Benefit) is paid or free school meals are provided at the time of the award.

The definition of a household with a pensioner is any household containing any person:

- who has reached State Pension age at the time of award

The definition of disability and disabled people aligns with the definition in the Equality Act 2010. Therefore, a disabled person is someone who has a physical or mental impairment that has a 'substantial' and 'long-term' negative effect on their ability to do normal daily activities:

- 'substantial' is more than minor or trivial, for example it takes much longer than it normally would to complete a daily task like getting dressed;
- 'long-term' means 12 months or more, for example a breathing condition that develops as a result of a lung infection.

Eligible spend includes

Eligible expenditure means payments made, or committed to, by the Authority or any person acting lawfully on behalf of the Authority, during the Grant Period, under the Scheme.

- A. the Authority is to ensure that the grant is primarily allocated to support with the costs of energy (for heating, lighting and cooking), food, water (for household purposes, including sewerage) and other essential living needs in accordance with the Scheme guidance;

- B. by exception and where existing housing support has been exhausted, the Authority may allocate grant funds to support with housing costs as set out in the Scheme guidance;

Types of support and eligible spend

The Fund is expected to support vulnerable households with energy, food and water costs, and wider essentials, and Authorities should prioritise support which offers immediate impact to those in need. Support can be delivered through cash, vouchers or in kind. There is no prescriptive list which provides a comprehensive definition of eligible spend, but it may include spend on:

- **Energy and Water.** This may include support with energy bills for any form of fuel that is used for the purpose of domestic heating, cooking, or lighting, including oil or portable gas cylinders. It can also be used to support water bills including for drinking, washing, cooking, as well as for sanitary purposes and sewerage
- **Food.** This may include through vouchers, cash or in kind.
- **Essentials linked to energy, water and food.** The Fund can be used to provide support with essentials linked to energy, water and food (for example insulation or energy efficient items which reduce bills, the purchase of equipment such as fridges, freezers, ovens, slow cookers or costs associated with obtaining these essentials, e.g. delivery, installation). We encourage Authorities to consider supporting households on low incomes to repair or replace white goods and appliances with more energy efficient ones, or to invest in simple energy efficiency measures which will pay back quickly, such as insulating a hot water tank, fitting draft excluders to a front door, or replacing inefficient lightbulbs or white goods. The intention of this is to provide sustainable support which results in immediate and potentially long-lasting savings for the household
- **Wider essentials.** The Fund can be used to support wider essential needs not linked to energy, water or food should Authorities consider this appropriate in their area. These may include, but are not limited to, support with other bills including broadband or phone bills, clothing including uniform, period and hygiene products, essential transport-related costs such as repairing a car, buying a bicycle, or paying for fuel. It can also include one-off payments to prevent a crisis
- **Advice services.** The Fund may be used to provide supplementary advice services to award recipients, including debt, benefit and/or employment advice, where Authorities consider this appropriate. As above, Authorities are reminded that the primary intention of The Fund is to provide support for those households most in need, and we would expect any advice services to complement this. We would not expect a large portion of funding to be spent on advice services. We would expect to see a connection between the funding provided for advice services and the practical support provided under The Fund. We anticipate that a significant proportion of this will be through signposting to existing advice services funded through other routes, such as the Help to Claim scheme which supports those making a claim to Universal Credit.

Preventative Support. The Fund may be used to prevent poverty locally and build local resilience. This enables Authorities to fund activity which prevents vulnerable residents from falling into – or falling further into – crisis. This could include specific support to individual households or wider support within the broader community, such as warm spaces. This could include providing funding to local community groups who deliver preventative services. This is not mandatory activity, and we still expect the Fund to primarily provide crisis support to those most in need. We would not expect a large portion of funding to be spent on preventative support.

Housing costs. The Fund can be used to support housing costs. However, where eligible, ongoing housing support for rent must be provided through the Housing cost element of Universal Credit and Housing Benefit rather than the Fund. In addition, eligibility for Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs) must first be considered before housing support is offered through The Fund. The Authority must also first consider whether the claimant is at statutory risk of homelessness and therefore owed a duty of support through the Homelessness Prevention Grant (HPG). It is expected that the focus of support should be on bills and that support for housing costs should only be given where existing housing support schemes do not meet need. Beyond this, Authorities have discretion to determine the most appropriate use of The Fund for their area, based on their understanding of local need and with due regard to equality considerations

Households in receipt of Housing Benefit, Universal Credit, or Discretionary Housing Payments can still receive housing cost support through the Fund if it is deemed necessary by their Authority. However, The Fund should not be used to provide housing support on an ongoing basis or to support unsustainable tenancies. Individuals in receipt of some other form of housing support could still qualify for the other elements of The Fund, such as food, energy, water, essentials linked to energy and water and wider essentials

The Fund cannot be used to provide mortgage support, though homeowners could still qualify for the other elements of The Fund (such as energy, food, water, essentials linked to energy and water and wider essentials). Where a homeowner is having difficulty with their mortgage payments, they should contact their lender as soon as possible to discuss their circumstances as lenders will have a set procedure to assist. Those who are in receipt of or treated as receiving a qualifying benefit could be entitled to Support for Mortgage Interest

The Fund can exceptionally and in genuine emergency be used to provide support for historic rent arrears built up prior to an existing benefit claim for households already in receipt of Universal Credit and Housing Benefit. This is because these arrears are excluded from the criteria for Discretionary Housing Payments. However, support with rent arrears is not the primary intent of The Fund and should not be the focus of spend

Individual awards can be whatever type and amount is deemed appropriate by Authorities for the receiving household, bearing in mind the overall spend eligibility priorities listed above, the intention that The Fund provides support throughout The Fund Period, and the risk of fraud and error. Awards to any given

household can cover several or only one of the spend eligibility categories listed above.

4. Eligibility for applications for food, energy and water (utility bills)

The Fund is for those residents whose liability for Council Tax is because their sole or main residence at the time of award is within the Runnymede Borough Council area and have been assessed as requiring support with the cost of day to day living or pay bills, and have a disposable household income below the following annual amounts based on the average of £38,300 and savings of less than £6,000.

Household income includes all benefits, earnings and pensions and household disposable is defined as the amount that households have left to spend after paying taxes (including Council Tax), rent or mortgage and childcare costs.

The following information must be supplied:

- National Insurance number
- latest two consecutive months bank/building society statements for all accounts held in the household. These must clearly show:
 - name, address, sort code and account number
 - all transactions (including all income and all payments)
- sufficient evidence that demonstrates the household income and disposable income is below the appropriate threshold and the household has less than £6,000 in savings.

Where energy or water costs are required, the person applying for the Fund should wherever possible be the individual named on the energy or water bill.

Applications maybe refused where there is no evidence that energy or water bills are being paid.

Armed Forces Covenant

As part of our commitment to supporting the Armed Forces community residing in Surrey, we will disregard all war pension and war disability payments when assessing household income.

Repeat applications

Further awards may be made conditional on the applicant taking some action themselves, for example applying for benefits or social tariffs, contacting Citizens Advice, their energy supplier or other creditors.

With the exception of Food vouchers, receipts and evidence must be provided of how any previous award has been spent.

Eligibility for applications for essentials linked to energy and water, wider essentials and housing costs

Eligibility will be assessed on need by the Benefit Team or our trusted partner organisations, Citizens Advice, Adult Social Care Team and Runnymede Borough

Council Housing and Revenues Teams. Eligibility is assessed per household, taking into account household composition income and savings.

A household is defined as the lead claimant, their partner, spouse or civil partner if they have one, any other adults living in the property, and any dependent children.

A claimant will need to demonstrate that they and/or their household are unable to pay energy or water bills, repay priority debts, buy essential items or are otherwise experiencing difficulties, particularly those who cannot increase their income through work, to prevent the escalation of problems.

Ukrainian guests will be able to claim help with essentials linked to energy and water, travel expenses and wider essentials where they and/or their household are unable to buy essential items, pay for travel, clothing or mobile phone bills.

Winter Fuel Payment

Those over the age of 66, ineligible for Pension Credit will no longer receive a Winter Fuel payment. Applicants who can prove they have claimed Pension Credit since 1st August 2024, and it has been unsuccessful will be eligible for a one-off total payment of either:

- £200 if you were born between 23 September 1944 and 22 September 1958
- £300 if you were born before 23 September 1944

Anyone receiving this payment would not be able to eligible for any other utility bill costs from this scheme.

Huggg packs

In partnership with Huggg, we are developing a range of packs to help over the winter months.

Winter Warm Pack - with combinations of:

- Textile Draught Excluders
- Radiator Foil
- Letterbox Flaps
- Window Insulation Kits
- Foam Draught Excluder Tape
- Digital Hygrometers
- Thermal socks
- Fleece scarfs
- Thermal gloves
- Thermal hats
- Fleece Blankets
- Travel mug
- Hot water bottle with cover
- Fleece Gilet (Sizes S-XL)

5. Eligibility for applications for School Uniforms

During the Christmas term break the scheme will be open to residents with children at school, to help with the cost of uniforms, winter clothing and shoes.

The scheme will open 22nd December 2024 and close 21st January 2025.

Criteria:

- The Fund is for those residents whose liability for Council Tax is because their sole or main residence at the time of award is within the Runnymede Borough Council area and have a household income of below £38,300 per year and savings below £6,000.
- £150.00 maximum per household and is a one-off payment during the period 23rd December 2024 to 19th January 2025
- The child must be of school age and attending school
- Payment is in the form of a £50.00 Huggg voucher that can be exchanged at Clarks, Primark, Asda, M&S, Matalan, Sainsbury's, Tesco, ALDI or B&M.
- Application is via GrantApproval application form

6. Administering the scheme

The Council has a duty to carefully consider every application on its individual merits, considering the relevant circumstances affecting each resident.

The Council and its trusted partners will assess the need based on a completed nomination or GrantApproval application form.

The Council will publicise the scheme through the Council's website and social media.

Residents will be required to make an application with supporting documentary evidence either to the Council or a trusted partner organisation by 11 March 2024, or sooner if the fund has run out. If the resident is unable to meet any of the criteria, they should clearly explain why.

7. Caps on awards

The level of relief awarded will be capped at £2,000.00 per household to ensure as many people as possible are supported and payment will be by voucher only.

Individual Caps are

Type of support	Cap for Household Support fund 6
Food	£400
Energy and water	£750.00
Essentials linked to Energy & water	£150.00
School Uniforms	

White Goods	£813.00 (installation + removal + delivery (upper floors, no lift))
Wider essentials	£350.00
Housing costs	£2,000.00
Crisis payment	£2,000.00

Government guidance proposes that this money is targeted towards recipients who are struggling to afford food, energy bills and other essential expenditure. Given the ambiguity of this criteria, expressing this in a more transparent manner will help potential applicants understand if they will be eligible and what level of award they can expect.

Type of support	Comments
<p>food: The Fund can be used to provide support with food, whether in kind or through vouchers or cash.</p>	<p>£80.00 per household with children £50.00 per household without children</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> No more than 1 Huggg Groceries voucher per month
<p>energy and water: The Fund should primarily be used to support energy bills for any form of fuel that is used for the purpose of domestic heating, cooking, or lighting, including oil or portable gas cylinders. It can also be used to support water bills including for drinking, washing, cooking, as well as for sanitary purposes and sewerage.</p>	<p>Up to £150.00 for electricity, gas and water arrears.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> No more than 1 payment per month up to the amount outstanding on the bill over £10.00 Each application must be accompanied by a utility bill dated in the last 30 days and show that any previous payments of the Fund have been used to reduce the arrears. Those on prepaid meters will be given the amount shown outstanding plus £20.00
<p>essentials linked to energy and water: The Fund can be used to provide support with essentials linked to energy and water (for example warm clothing, blankets), in recognition that a range of costs may arise which directly affect a household's ability to afford or access energy, food and water.</p>	<p>£80.00 per household with children £50.00 per household without children</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limited to 1 Huggg Home essentials or Clothing voucher <p>NB: School Uniform provision £50 School Uniform voucher</p> <p>Small Appliances - Include toasters, microwaves, slow cookers, air fryers, and a selection of heaters.</p> <p>Winter Warm Packs - a number of packs to choose, including items that heat the person, or items that insulate the home, plus a combination pack that does both.</p>

<p>White Goods essentials linked to energy and water: The Fund can be used to provide support with essentials linked to energy and water (for example the purchase of equipment such as fridges, freezers, ovens, slow cookers), in recognition that a range of costs may arise which directly affect a household's ability to afford or access energy, food and water. In particular, we encourage Authorities to consider supporting households on low incomes to repair or replace white goods and appliances with more energy efficient ones, or to invest in energy efficiency measures which will pay back quickly, such as replacing inefficient white goods. The intention of this is to provide sustainable support which could result in both immediate and long-lasting savings for the household.</p>	<p>£813.00 per household (max includes installation + removal + delivery (upper floors, no lift))</p> <p>Examples: repair or replace fridges, freezers, ovens, slow cookers</p> <p>Send appliances directly to recipients' homes via Huggg, individually or in bulk. A phone number or email address is required.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Choose an integrated or standalone washing machine, cooker, or fridge on Huggg. 2. Add options like installation, removal, or upper-floor delivery without a lift, then and send it via text or email. 3. Recipients click the link to provide their address. 4. The delivery company will contact the recipient directly to arrange delivery. 5. For any delivery or product issues, recipients can contact the delivery company or Huggg. 6. All orders are tracked in Huggg reports, where you can see when links are opened and redeemed.
<p>wider essentials. The Fund can be used to support wider essential needs not linked to energy and water should Authorities consider this appropriate in their area. These may include, but are not limited to, support with other bills including broadband or phone bills, clothing, period and hygiene products, essential transport-related costs such as repairing a car, buying a bicycle, or paying for fuel. This list is not exhaustive.</p>	<p>£350.00 maximum per household.</p> <p>Examples: digital access (phone and/or broadband) or essential transport-related costs.</p>
<p>housing costs. The Fund can be used to support housing costs. However, where eligible, ongoing housing support for rent must be provided through the Housing cost element of UC and HB rather than The Fund. In addition, eligibility for DHPs must first be considered before housing support is offered through The Fund. The Authority must also first consider whether the claimant is at statutory risk of homelessness and therefore owed a duty of support through the Homelessness Prevention Grant (HPG). It is expected that the focus of support should be on bills and that support for housing costs should only be</p>	<p>£2,000.00 maximum per household.</p> <p>Where the property is owned by the Council, the payment will be made direct to the rent account</p>

given where existing housing support schemes do not meet need. Beyond this, Authorities have discretion to determine the most appropriate Fund for their area, based on their understanding of local need and with due regard to equality considerations.	
Crisis Fund	£2,000 maximum per household. For example following flood, fire or partner, parent or guardian of a child or child bereavement in the household.

As the scheme is cash limited, all applications will be dealt with on a first come, first served basis, and when the fund has been spent, no more applications will be paid.

8. Managing the process

Residents are required to provide to the trusted partner organisation or the council a statement of their circumstances, the reasons for the application plus any such evidence, documents, receipts, financial statements including bank statements clearly showing their total income and savings and where necessary essential expenditure, the name and bank account details etc. necessary to allow the trusted partner organisation and the Council to make an informed decision. Where insufficient information is provided, despite reminders, then no relief will be granted.

Trusted partners must declare on a relevant household's behalf that they meet all relevant eligibility criteria.

In all cases, the Council will notify the resident of decisions made.

It is envisaged, the trusted partner organisations will be best placed to make grants in respect of Wider Essentials, Housing Costs and Essentials linked to energy and water, such as boiler service/repair, purchase of equipment including fridges, freezers, ovens, etc. While the local authority can deal with Food and Energy and Water.

Where the trusted partner organisations identify a need for Food, Energy and Water and Essentials linked to energy and water, then applications can be made via them and without the restrictions to welfare benefit entitlement, where the trusted partner organisations is satisfied the claimant is in urgent need. Though further checks would be conducted to ensure there is no duplication for the same costs in the same period.

Where an application is successful, the following will be notified to the applicant in writing:

- the amount of The Fund granted, the method of payment and the date on which it will be paid;

Where relief is not granted then the following information will be provided, again in writing:

- an explanation of the decision within the context of the authority's statutory duty; and an explanation of the appeal rights (see below).

Runnymede Borough Council reserve the right to conduct inspections to check that goods provided have been bought and are being used by the applicant.

Where safeguarding issues for a vulnerable child or adult are identified an award may not be made, but the customer should be referred to the appropriate service.

9. Appeal rights

Whilst there is no formal right of appeal except by judicial review, in the interests of natural justice and to eliminate the risk of administrative error, applicants may seek a review of the decision from the Council.

Where the authority receives a request from a resident for a review of the decision regarding the granting or refusal of discretionary funding grant, the case will be reviewed by the Corporate Head of Customer, Digital & Collection Services.

10. How does the Council prevent fraudulent claims for the Scheme?

The Council will ensure that all applications are validated by proof of identity, including checking details submitted using our application form with data held by the Council, and for bank accounts where it is necessary to do so.

If you falsely declare your circumstances, provide a false statement or provide false evidence in support of your application, you may have committed an offence under the Fraud Act 2006.

Any actual, potential or perceived conflict of interest must be declared by the referring party. Failure to do so will result in the termination of referrals from the referring organisation and a referral to the Fraud Service.

Runnymede Borough Council has a zero-tolerance approach to fraud and financial irregularity. All suspicions of fraud relating to this scheme will be referred to Surrey Police. In addition to any criminal action, the Council will seek to recover all fraud losses.

If it is subsequently identified that a payment under the Scheme has been awarded as a result of false or fraudulent information, including the claiming of duplicate awards, the Council reserves the right to withdraw the award and recover the resulting sum due.

For all information contained within this document contact:

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