

Runnymede Borough Council Residents Support Fund scheme

November 2024

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Document control

1. Introduction

The Government extended the Household Support fund (5) for vulnerable households until September 2024. 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. £77,001	June 2023 – March 2024
5. £125,668	June 2024 – September 24

Vulnerable households across Runnymede have been 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 global inflationary challenges and the significantly rising cost of living. Payment is made under Section 31 Local Government Finance Act 2003. Runnymede Borough Council received £326,504 during 2023/2024 to support families who have been adversely impacted.

A further £125,668 was allocated in June 2024 to deliver a fifth tranche round of support from July 24 to September 2024.

Whilst the new Government have recently announced a sixth round of support this will be only be available up to 31 March 2025. As such, Runnymede have introduced a 'Residents Support' Fund to help those residents who are still struggling to afford food and other essential expenditure.

Ongoing financing of this Residents Support fund may be through a combination of council resources and/or external donations. The budget will be subject to annual review.

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. Discretionary Grant Funding: Runnymede Residents Support Fund

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

- To use their discretion on how to identify and support those in most need.
- To help those who are struggling to afford food and essential expenditure due to the cost-of-living crisis.
- 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 initially covers the period 01 October 2024 to 31 March 2025 inclusive. However, the Residents Support scheme would only be implemented after the relevant Household Support Fund budgets have been fully depleted. This ensures that the Council's resources are utilised in the most effective manner, prioritising those who are most in need.
- The policy will be kept under review and may change.

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.

4. 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.

5. Eligible spend includes

It is expected that the focus of support should be on bills and food and that support for housing costs should be met from other existing schemes such as the Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) Council Tax Support or Council Tax Hardship:

- Energy and water. The Fund should primarily be used to 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 with water bills including for drinking, washing, cooking, and sanitary purposes and sewerage.
- Food. The Fund should also primarily be used to provide support with food whether in kind or through vouchers or cash.
- Essentials linked to energy and water. The Fund can be used to provide support with essentials linked to energy and water (including sanitary products, warm clothing, soap, blankets, boiler service/repair, purchase of equipment including

fridges, freezers, ovens, etc.), in recognition that a range of costs may arise which directly affect a household's ability to afford or access energy, food and water.

- Wider essentials. The Fund can be used to support with 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, and essential transport-related costs such as repairing a car, buying a bicycle or paying for fuel. This list is not exhaustive.
- Eligible spend does not include Mortgage costs

6. 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 household income below £38,300 per year and savings of less than £6,000.

Household income includes all benefits, earnings and pensions.

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:
 - names
 - all transactions (including income, fuel bills, rent and regular payments where possible)
 - that 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 may be refused where there is no evidence that energy or water bills are being paid.

7. 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.

Council Tax Support – Self employed

Those in receipt of Council Tax Support (CTS) and are Self-employed are subject to a Minimum Income Floor (MIF) after the first year of trading. Any resident who is no longer entitled to Council Tax support between April 2023 and March 2024, because of the operation of the MIF will be offered a grocery voucher. Those customers affected will be contacted by the Benefit Team, when their CTS ends.

8. 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 19 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

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 2025, or sooner if the fund has run out. If the resident is unable to meet any of the criteria, they should clearly explain why.

The level of relief awarded will be capped at £500 per household to ensure as many people as possible are supported and payment will be by voucher only.

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
food:	£80.00 per household with children

The Fund can be used to provide support with food, whether in kind or through vouchers or cash.	£50.00 per household without children <ul style="list-style-type: none"> No more than 1 Huggg Groceries voucher per month
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.	Up to £150.00 for electricity, gas and water arrears. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> No more than 1 payment per month up to the amount outstanding on the bill over £10 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
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.	£80.00 per household with children £50.00 per household without children Limited to 1 Huggg Home essentials or Clothing voucher NB: School Uniform provision £50 School Uniform voucher

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.

9. 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.

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 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).
- Powers given to the authority for the granting, varying, reviewing and revocation of The Fund under the Local Government Finance Act 1988, the Local

Government and Rating Act 1997, the Local Government Act 2003 and the Localism Act 2011 shall be delegated to the Assistant Chief Executive (Resources) in conjunction with the Corporate Head of Customer, Digital & Collection Services.

- The amount of funding to be provided by the Council in respect of The Fund shall be contained within existing budgets.

10. 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.

11. 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.

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