

Bristol City Council - Household Support Fund Policy April 2023 – March 2024

1. Background

Following the Chancellor's Autumn Budget Statement, it was announced that there will be a fourth round of the Household Support Fund to cover the period April 2023 to March 2024, with a further £1 billion (£842m for England) being released to councils, to support those most in need with the cost of food, energy and water bills, phone, broadband and clothing and in exceptional cases, housing costs. This funding is for a whole year as opposed to previous versions which have been for six months only.

This funding to councils on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) is made under section 31 of the Local Government Act 2003, who will administer the scheme and provide direct assistance to vulnerable households and families with children particularly affected by the increase in the cost of living.

2. Period Covered

This further extension to the Hardship Support Fund will enable Bristol City Council to provide support to vulnerable households and individuals from April 2023 to 30 March 2024.

3. Hardship Support Fund

3.1 Funding available

Bristol City Council will receive a grant of £8,079,930 in arrears and based on four management information (MI) returns in; July 2023, October 2023, January 2024 and April 2024 and the amounts committed at the point of their return.

3.2 Eligibility Criteria

- Can be used to assist households with the costs of; food, gas/electricity, water, phone/broadband, essential household items (e.g. white goods, beds/bedding, clothing, baby/sanitary products) and housing costs (in exceptional circumstance)
- Monies are not ringfenced to any proportion of funding for any particular cohort of people.
- The fund can be used to provide supplementary advice services to award recipients, including debt and benefit advice, but should not be the primary function.
- Local authorities need to consider those groups who may not have benefitted from any of the recent cost of living support.
- No application is needed if households requiring assistance can be determined in advance.
- Every local authority must, at least in part, have an application basis grant provision i.e. residents should have the opportunity to come forward to ask for support
- Individuals, regardless of their immigration status are eligible to ensure a basic safety net of support
- Cannot be used for advice or mortgage related costs.
- The scheme must also be adequately advertised.

3.3 Implementation of fund

- Can be used for existing schemes and other support which deliver the same outcomes and where the need is greatest, but need to be mindful of possible funding overlaps
- Can be provided in cash, vouchers and/or advise.
- Distribution of grants can be made using the voluntary/third sector.
- A proportion of the funds can be used for administration; however these costs should be kept to a minimum, in order to maximise the overarching funds available to support our most vulnerable citizens. Due to the approach being adopted in the deployment of these funds, the administration cost is expected to be in the region of £250,000 (3% of total funding)

3.4 Reporting structure

All public authorities must comply with the Public Sector Equality Duty and MI is required to be kept and maintained by the relevant organisations and provided to the Council to report on delivery of agreed objectives and actual spend.

3.5 Receipt of funds

The grant will be paid in arrears and based on MI quarterly returns. Payment will be made in arrears after each interim MI returns and the final MI return at the end of April 2024.

4. Approved /Proposed Spend

The table below shows the proposed amount of monies to be agreed by Cabinet.

Award	Spend Value	Comments
Targeted support for 2 – 16+ who receive Free School Meals and/or Pupil Premium over all school holidays within the financial year 2023/24.	£3,390,000	This is for a total of one week at a value of £15 x 22,600 children. This is an extension of the previous FSM reach. Vouchers will be supplied which allows the recipient to choose which supermarket they wish to use or on fuel bills. This will cover May, Summer, October, Christmas and February holidays covering 10 weeks.
Application based to cover all households not covered by below/above, via the Local Crisis and Prevention Fund	£698,000	Advertised assistance to help c4,000 low-income household in crisis with food/fuel /furniture poverty and associated administration/staff costs. (£550k + £148k respectively). Awards will be made via vouchers will be supplied which allows the recipient to choose which supermarket they wish to use or on fuel bills and/or essential household

		goods.
Application based support to cover those who still needs assistance with Housing Costs (over and above HB/UC) via the Discretionary Housing Payment fund.	£500,000	<p>Advertised assistance to help c1,100 low-income household in additional need with housing costs.</p> <p>This will be paid via the Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) fund with support being enabled in addition to any government (DWP) grant.</p>
Targeted support to assist those with No Resource to Public Funds (including Syrian/ Afghanistan Refugees and Asylum Seekers households known directly to BCC).	£200,000	<p>This is being administered by direct award using the existing provisions via Housing Options to the Red Cross.</p> <p>This will assist c250 households at approx. £800 on average, where families are on low incomes and unable to access state benefits and are not being assisted by other existing refugee schemes.</p>
Care Leavers and Foster Children payments	£440,000	To assist c100 care leavers and c450 foster children to get vouchers at £800 each, to assist with their food and heating costs. To be administered by Children, Families and Safer Communities Directorate.
Bristol Age UK	£40,000	To provide emergency support to older people who are struggling financially due to the cost-of-living crisis (e.g. high inflation on food, fuel, and housing costs, benefit uprating for 2022 less than half the rate of inflation).
Feeding Bristol	£700,000	<p>Targeted support to assist city wide households in need with food poverty via a variety of solutions.</p> <p>This includes; supporting existing food pantries, increasing food supply (via FareShare), extending food parcels beyond the HAF programme, allowing Community Groups and Organisations and Welcoming Spaces to access funding for the food support, and ensuring funds assist those most vulnerable.</p>
Centre for Sustainable Energy	£625,000	<p>Support at least 740 vulnerable households, who are negatively impacted by rising energy costs, who can't afford to heat their homes over the winter, or who need emergency support to install or repair their heating system.</p> <p>Eligible households will be low-incomes and have a clear need for assistance to pay their energy bills and stay warm over the year.</p>

CTR Pensioner Additional Support	£100,000 (estimated)	A further top of support to pensioner households in receipt of partial CTR by around £25 per household, but in addition to the £75 already provided by the Council Tax Reduction Support Scheme.
Support for disabled households	£300,000	Targeted support to disabled households to assist with food/fuel poverty via grants awarded by WECIL, Bristol Disability Equality Forum and Bristol Reclaiming Independent Living.
Residual	£836,930	Spend to be agreed by October 2023 by the Director Finance in consultation with the Cabinet Member and Deputy Mayor; City Economy Finance and Performance, in order to potentially add to existing agree priorities within the policy, and/or other initiatives, including advice/support services, if it is believed that may not be identified to date.
Administration, procurement communications, and marketing.	£250,000	This is 3% of the total award and to assist with the cost of administration.
Total	£8,079,930	