

**Approach and Eligibility Criteria for the Nottinghamshire Household Support Fund**

**Phase 2 – April to September 2022**

1. **Background**

An extension to the Household Support Fund (provided by the DWP) announcement was made on 23 March 2022 which confirmed that another £500 million has been made available to County Councils and Unitary Authorities in England to support those most in need this year. The funding covers the period **1 April 2022 to 30 September 2022** inclusive.

As per the previous fund which ran from October 2021 until 31 March 2022, Nottinghamshire has been allocated **£5.6 million** to support households who would otherwise struggle to buy food, pay essential utility bills, or meet other essential living costs.

The guidance document provided by the Department for Work and Pensions states that at least one third of the funding **(£1.88m)** must be applied to vulnerable households with children (under 19 years) and at least one third of the funding **(£1.88m)** to be available for pensioners and the remainder is available for vulnerable households without children (including individuals).

1. **Fund Allocation**

Discussions with Partnership Steering Group Members and Elected Members based on the revised criteria for the new fund has resulted in the following decisions to be made on applying the funding for Nottinghamshire.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Group/purpose** | **Allocations**  **Made** | **Allocations to be made** | **Total Funding** | **Min %**  **Required by Govt** | **Overall %**  **Proposed** |
| **Households with Children** – Holiday food vouchers for those entitled to Free School Meals. In addition, through a referral, a voucher for children under 5 with an equivalence of need to those entitled to Free School Meals. | **£904,560**  (Easter)  **£450,000**  (May/June Half Term) | **£1,500,000**  (Summer Holiday - £50 per child) | **£2,854,560** | 33.3% | 50.6% |
| **Pensioners** | - | **£1,882,150** | **£1,882,150** | 33.3% | 33.3% |
| **Non-pensioner Households without children** | - | **£609,740** | **£609,740** | - | 10.8% |
| **Administration costs** | **£159,654** (County) | **£140,346**  (District/  Borough/  Partners) | **£300,000** | - | 5.3% |
| **TOTAL** | **£1,514,214** | **£4,132,236** | **£5,646,450** | **-** | **100%** |

The changes to the guidelines of the fund, along with the number of school holidays in the duration of the fund has meant the summer holidays will be funded at £50 per child.

1. **Partnership Approach**

As per the previous fund, the Household Support Fund Steering Group have agreed the high-level design principles for the Nottinghamshire scheme to continue in the same manner:

* One scheme to cover all areas of Nottinghamshire.
* The scheme will only be promoted to local organisations and services, rather than direct to residents, except for pensioners if needed. Direct self-referrals will not be accepted into the fund.
* It will proactively identify those pensioners in immediate need at launch and only if required, will subsequently accept individual applications from them.
* Initially, data from the DWP will be used to identify pensioners eligible for support, depending on how the fund progresses, referrals may then be taken from wider organisations. The DWPs (Department for Work and Pensions) Searchlight system may be used to confirm eligibility of applicants of pensionable age.
* Professional frontline officers working for the Borough and District Councils and NCC internal services will use their knowledge and understanding of need to identify and assess residents who need support. They will check eligibility and make a request for financial support on the resident’s behalf if the applicant is deemed to be in need.  Other relevant organisations may be included in this process as the fund progresses.
* The partnership will also seek to provide support to those households in the target cohorts wherever possible in a more automated way and seek to avoid the need for full assessments where appropriate.
* The County Council will receive and process applications to the scheme to ensure consistency, improve anti-fraud measures, and provide monitoring information to the Government.
* Vouchers will be used as far as possible to provide the needed support to residents.
* The primary focus of the local eligibility criteria developed will be support for food and energy.
* In common with previous schemes, the Council will be using Huggg Food and Energy Vouchers. They will also be using Huggg Cash Advance Vouchers to provide energy support to those not using the PayPoint meter payment system.
* Referred in applications for funding will be awarded on a first-come, first-served basis.

1. **Aim of the Nottinghamshire Scheme**

Funding will be used to provide support to vulnerable households who are identified as being in most need to help with significantly rising living costs. It will focus support to food and energy.

The aim of the scheme is to provide one third of the total funding to pensioners who are in need of support. It will also provide families who are in receipt of free school meals with support in the school holidays, and low income families with children under 5 who are not eligible for funded child care and not in receipt of free school meals. Further, the fund will provide support for non-pensioner households without children. Support will be on a case-by-case basis following an assessment by a professional.

**As set out in Section 2, over 50% of the fund will be applied via holiday food vouchers to 30,000 Households with Children that are eligible for free school meals. These include those in Early Years and Post-16 Education. Further, for the summer period, an equivalent £50 per child payment will be made available to pre-school age children (0-4 years) who are either too young to receive early years free school meal provision, or have not registered for free childcare support.**

**Therefore, the partnership efforts needs to be focused to ensure that at least £1.88m is applied to pensioners, £610k to non-pensioner households who do not have children, and those children aged 0-4 who have an equivalent level of eligibility/need as children entitled to free school meals.**

For phase 2, referrals for support will be made via a professional for ‘non-pensioner households without children’ and ‘low-income families with children under 5 who are not eligible for funded child care and not in receipt of free school meals’. Pensioner support will primarily be identified directly through data supplied by the DWP (see section 5 for more detail).

**Appendix One** gives the full Government guidance on those distinct categories of eligible expenditure.

1. **Households eligible for the Nottinghamshire Scheme**

Eligible households under this phase are those that are in **immediate need** and **fit in one of the categories listed below.**

**Please note eligibility does not automatically mean that support from the fund is needed. Professional referrers should assess the applicant’s individual circumstances and use their judgement** **to identify if they are in immediate need.**

Examples of immediate need are provided below:

* Applicant who is reliant on a food bank
* Applicant at risk of having their energy supply cut off
* Applicant has lost a job and need immediate support for food or energy

**The list above is not exhaustive and professional judgment should be applied**

**Following assessment, if it is deemed support is needed, an application can be made using the referral form****.**

**CATEGORIES FOR PHASE 2 FOOD AND ENERGY SUPPORT THROUGH INITIAL REFERRALS:**

* **Low Income Households with children under 5, not eligible for funded childcare and not in receipt of Free School Meals** who fit one of the following criteria;
* Children under 2 not attending childcare settings
* Households with a 2, 3, or 4 year old not accessing childcare entitlements or early years pupil premium.
* Known to domestic abuse services.
* No recourse to public funds.
* Assessed by a professional as in urgent need for food or energy
* **Non-pensioner households without children** who are receiving one of the following:
* Council Tax Reduction
* Housing Benefit
* Universal Credit that includes housing costs in the calculation
* Income Support
* Income based Job Seekers Allowance
* Income based Employment Support Allowance
* Working Tax Credits
* Known to domestic abuse services.
* No recourse to public funds.
* Experiencing considerable in-work poverty.
* Assessed by a professional as in urgent need for food and energy

**CATEGORIES FOR PHASE 2 FOOD AND ENERGY SUPPORT (TO IDENTIFY ELIGIBLE PENSIONERS WHERE REQUIRED)**

* **Pensioners** in receipt of:
  + Pensioners who are slightly above the threshold to receive any pension credit and deemed in immediate need
  + Attendance allowance
  + As living in poverty.
  + Pension Credit (Guarantee or Savings Credit)
  + Council Tax Reduction
  + Housing Benefit
  + Higher Rate Disability Allowance/PIP
  + Known to domestic abuse services.
  + No recourse to public funds
  + Experiencing considerable poverty
  + Assessed by a professional as in urgent need for food or energy support

**NOTES:**

The Cost-of-Living payment of £650 will now be available and the eligibility has commonality with this scheme. Assessors should take into consideration that some individuals may be in receipt of support in other areas outside of this fund before making requests for support due to the level of funding available.

1. **Households not eligible for support**

Those ineligible for consideration for the Nottinghamshire scheme are:

* Those who **live outside of the Nottinghamshire County Council borders** who will need to approach their own Local Authority.

1. **How will the need for support be identified and assessed?**

Local professionals working for the County, Borough and District Councils will play two essential roles in ensuring that all the funding is delivered within pressing timescales in a fair way to those in most need across the County.

* **Identifying Need** - Firstly, they will be the ‘eyes and ears’ of the partnership, using their local intelligence, frontline knowledge and understanding of local communities to **identify those target households in immediate need** of support. Where possible, the partnership will utilise datasets that evidence existing need to deliver support in an automated way that seeks to minimise the need for further detailed assessments.
* **Assessors** - Secondly, where needed, for example where individuals are missed from automated processes, those nominated professionals will be able to **undertake an assessment** to ensure;

a) the **household’s eligibility** to support as set out in section 4, and

b) to **assess the level of need and support** that should be provided.

Those nominated professional assessors would then make a request for the financial support to the appropriate support provider **certifying the legitimacy** of the request.

As part of a phased approach to the rollout of the fund (section 10), other trusted agencies may be onboarded to undertake the assessments to increase the assessment capacity across the partnership. This will be decided following the rollout, through close monitoring, taking in to account the spend that has occurred.

Further to referrals taking place through County, Borough and District Councils, the pensioner cohort of those in need will initially be identified through data provided from DWP.

**DWP (Department for Work and Pensions) Searchlight –** The council may make use of information made available by the DWP via their Searchlight portal if appropriate to identify and verify eligibility of applicants.

**Referrers –** The County, District and Borough partners, using their local knowledge, will be able to identify households in need that would meet the eligibility criteria for the scheme where they might not have been identified through analysis of existing datasets. If the applicant is deemed to be in need and fits the criteria, an application can then be submitted. Other organisations may be brought on for phase 2, depending on progress in the coming weeks.

**Reasonable administrative costs –** One eligible category of expenditurefor the partnership is for reasonable administrative costs. The County Council is happy to discuss with partners involved in delivering the scheme recovery of reasonable costs incurred, for example in using some of the funding to either recruit resource to assess or to backfill for those undertaking assessments.

1. **Value of Vouchers**

Voucher support will be utilised for food and energy (up until the 30th of September 2022).

**The amount and value of vouchers that can be received in a household will be determined by the eligibility route in which the application is made. Initially, there will be two separate routes of application for referrals;**

* Low-income families with children under 5 who are not eligible for funded child care and not in receipt of free school meals
* Non-pensioner households without children

**The route of application for pensioners will initially be through direct means.**

1. **Eligible pensioners** will receive two vouchers per applicant; one energy and one food.
2. **Low-income families with children under 5 who are not eligible for funded child care and not in receipt of free school meals** will receive one £50 food voucher per eligible child.
3. **Non-pensioner Individuals or households without children** will receivetwo vouchers; one energy and one food.

For individual pensioners:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Food** | X1 voucher for food | **£50** |
| **Energy** | X1 voucher for energy | **£49** |

For low-income households with children under 5 who are not eligible for funded child care and not in receipt of free school meals:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Food** | A household with one eligible child | **£50** |
|  | A household with two eligible children | **£100** |
|  | A household with three eligible children | **£150** |

For non-pensioner households without children:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Food** | A household with one person | **£50** |
|  | A household with two people | **£100** |
|  | A household with three or more people | **£150** |
| **Energy** | X1 voucher for energy | **£49** |

1. **Exceptional Circumstances**

The partnership has decided to focus the local scheme on providing support with food and energy.

1. **Approach to Rollout**

Due to the limited period provided for the fund, the approach to provide support to pensioners, along with the funding already provided (via holiday food vouchers to those eligible for free school meals), it is proposed that the fund launch as soon as possible with prioritising delivery of:

* Support to those pensioners in immediate need initially through the use of existing datasets, e.g (from the DWP and Borough and District Council datasets of pensioners in receipt of benefits).
* Support to non-pensioner households without children working with County, Borough and District Council partners, and wider partners such as the Citizens Advice Bureau in the County if necessary.
* Support to low-income families with children under 5 who are not eligible for funded child care and not in receipt of free school meals by identifying those through County Council datasets (if available) and referrals from County, Borough, and District Council colleagues.
* Holiday food vouchers to early years, schools, academies, and post-16 education providers for the summer holiday.

**5th July 2022**

**APPENDIX ONE – ELIGIBLE SPEND OF THE FUND – GOVERNMENT GUIDANCE**

* **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.
* **Housing Costs.** In exceptional cases of genuine emergency where existing housing support schemes do not meet this exceptional need, the Fund can be used to support housing costs. Where eligible, ongoing housing support for rent must be provided through the housing cost element of Universal Credit (UC) and Housing Benefit (HB) rather than the Household Support Fund. In addition, eligibility for DHPs must first be considered before emergency housing support is offered through the Household Support 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).
  + - In exceptional cases of genuine emergency, households in receipt of HB, UC, or DHPs can still receive housing cost support through the Household Support 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 Household Support 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.
    - 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 DHPs. However, support with rent arrears is not the primary intent of the fund and should not be the focus of spend.
  + **Reasonable administrative costs**. This includes reasonable costs incurred administering the scheme. These include for example:
    - staff costs
    - advertising and publicity to raise awareness of the scheme
    - web page design
    - printing application forms
    - small IT changes, for example, to facilitate MI production
* **Eligible spend does not include**:
  + Advice services including debt advice;
  + Mortgage costs.