

Household Support Fund 3 Policy

Introduction

In late August 2022, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) announced that a third iteration of the Household Support Fund (HSF), (“the grant”) which would be made available to Councils in England to support those most in need to help with the rising cost of living.

The report to be presented to Cabinet in October 2022 provides the background, options and information on the proposed framework. This policy sets out the key criteria for Harrow’s Household Support Fund 3 programme.

Harrow Council has been allocated a grant of £1,476,707.18, which must be spent by 31 March 2023. This funding will cover the period 01 October 2022 to 31 March 2023 inclusive

Eligibility Criteria

The Grant is limited to awards covering the funding period from 1 October 2022 to 31st March 2023. Funds must have been spent or committed before 31 March 2023 and cannot be used for future commitments and should include an application based process.

Recipients must be households currently living within the Borough of Harrow.

Table 1 sets out general eligible criteria and definitions

Table 1: Housing Support Fund Criteria and Definitions

Condition / Principle	Guidance	Criteria
Households with Children		This means a household with: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) a person who will be under the age of 19 as at 31st March 2023, <u>or</u> 2) a person aged 19 or over in respect of whom a child-related benefit is paid or free school meals are provided during the period 03 October 2023 and 31 March 2023.
Free School Meals	The fund should be used to help those who are struggling to afford food	Any child resident in Harrow that is registered as being eligible for Free School Meals
Qualifying Benefit	Applicants will be eligible if they started to receive a qualifying means-tested benefit between 26 April 2022 to 25 May 2022 and 30 September 2022 that would have resulted in entitlement to the low income and tax credit cost-of-living payment.	Qualifying benefits are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Universal Credit • income-based Jobseeker’s Allowance (JSA) • income-related Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) • Income Support • Pension Credit • Child Tax Credit

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working Tax Credit • Attendance Allowance • Constant Attendance Allowance • Disability Living Allowance for adults • Disability Living Allowance for children • Personal Independence Payment • Adult Disability Payment (in Scotland) • Child Disability Payment (in Scotland) • Armed Forces Independence Payment • War Pension Mobility Supplement
Essential Living Costs	The HSF should primarily be used to support households in most need with eligible spend for essential living costs	<p>These costs should include:</p> <p>3) Food.</p> <p>4) Energy for domestic heating, cooking or lighting, including oil or portable gas cylinders.</p> <p>5) Water bills for drinking, washing, cooking, and sanitary purposes and sewerage.</p> <p>6) Essentials linked to the above, in recognition that costs may arise which directly affect a household's ability to afford or access food, energy and water. e.g.:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Sanitary products ii. Warm clothing iii. Soap iv. Blankets v. Boiler service/repair, vi. Purchase of energy efficient equipment including fridges, freezers, microwaves, etc. vii. Insulation, draft excluders
Associated Living Costs	The HSF can also be used to support households with certain other essential costs	<p>7) Wider essential costs not linked to energy and water. These may include, but are not limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Support with other bills including broadband or phone bills, ii. Other clothing iii. Other furniture such as mattress iv. Essential transport-related costs such as repairing a car, buying a bicycle or paying for fuel. v. Council Tax arrears
Other	The HSF can be used for other means of support not covered by the above	<p>8) Housing costs, in exceptional cases of genuine emergency where existing welfare and support i.e. the housing cost element of Universal Credit (UC), Housing Benefit (HB) or Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) do not meet this exceptional</p>

		<p>need, the HSF can be used to support housing costs but not mortgage payments.</p> <p>9) Support to individuals with No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF), funding can be provided, regardless of immigration status, if there is a genuine care need that does not arise solely from destitution, for example if:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. there are community care needs ii. they have serious health problems iii. there is a risk to a child's wellbeing <p>Furthermore, people with no recourse to public funds can access the scheme under s.138 of the Local Government Act as long as the Covid pandemic continues to be treated as an emergency/disaster.</p>
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Non-eligible spend

Eligible spend does not include the following:

- Advice services such as debt advice
- Mortgage costs.

Free School Meals

Table 2 provides the proposed funding levels for Free School Meals

Table 2: Proposed Funding for Free School Meals

Category	Estimated No of Children		Provisional Allocation of Funding (£)
Families with Children in receipt of Free School Meals (FSM):			
October 2022 Half-Term (5 days)	6263	£3.50 per day per child	109,602
Christmas Holidays (10 days)	6514	£3.50 per day per child plus additional £10 for Christmas	293,130
February Half Term (5 days)	6514	£3.50 per day per child	113,995
Easter Holidays (10 days)	6774	£3.50 per day per child	237,090
Total			£ 753,817

In addition, households in the borough both with and without children can apply for support funded by £140,000 for Help Harrow

Application Based Scheme

DWP guidance for Household Support Fund 3 (HSF3) sets out an expectation that local authorities will use an application based scheme to deliver part of the funding. The principle of the scheme is in line with DWP guidance in that it intends to assist residents in receipt of means tested or disability benefits who are liable for energy fuel in their home and have missed out on other cost of living payments

Detailed eligibility requirements for the DWP Cost-of-Living Payments can be found at:

[Cost of Living Payment - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk)

Funding

An allocation of £302,000 of Harrow's HSF3 funding has been made to this scheme. Once this pot has been spent, no more applications will be considered even if they have been received before the end of the funding period.

Qualifying criteria

To qualify for a payment under the HSF3 application based scheme, the applicant must meet the following criteria:

Must not have received a low-income/tax credit or disability cost of living award from DWP.

Example - someone who has received a low-income cost of living payment because they receive Universal Credit, can not receive an HSF3 payment because they have started to receive a disability benefit after the DWP qualifying date

Example 2 - a person who has received a disability cost of living payment but not a low-income payment, starts to receive Universal Credit after the DWP qualifying date, would not qualify for an HSF3 award.

Example 3 – a person who has not received a low income/tax credit or disability cost of living payment may qualify for a HSF3 award if they meet all of the other qualifying criteria

And,

Must be liable for energy fuel for the property in which they live. Energy fuel is defined by DWP as '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, as well as for sanitary purposes and sewerage.'

And, they meet one of the following criteria:

Started to receive a qualifying means-tested benefit between 26 April 2022 to 25 May 2022 and 30 September 2022 that would have resulted in entitlement to the low income and tax credit cost-of-living payment. Qualifying benefits are :

- Universal Credit

- income-based Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA)
- income-related Employment and Support Allowance (ESA)
- Income Support
- Pension Credit
- Child Tax Credit
- Working Tax Credit

Or

Started to receive a qualifying benefit between 26 May 2022 and 30 September 2022 inclusive that would have resulted in entitlement to the Disability cost-of-living payment. Qualifying benefits are:

- Attendance Allowance
- Constant Attendance Allowance
- Disability Living Allowance for adults
 - Disability Living Allowance for children
 - Personal Independence Payment
 - Adult Disability Payment (in Scotland)
 - Child Disability Payment (in Scotland)
 - Armed Forces Independence Payment
 - War Pension Mobility Supplement

Or

For the period 26 April 2022 to 30 September 2022, have not received any of the qualifying benefits set out in the above two criteria, are in receipt of Housing Benefit at some point in this period and have not received a targeted payment under HSF3

Or

Would ordinarily be entitled to a low income/tax credit cost of living qualifying benefit but were nil entitled during the qualifying period for a low income/tax credit cost of living payment. To qualify for an award under this HSF3 scheme, the applicant must have received a qualifying benefit in the payment period immediately before and immediately after the qualifying period of 26 April 2022 to 25 May 2022.

This scheme does not cover any payments in relation to other types of cost of living payment, including Pensioner cost of living payment, Council Tax Rebate or the Energy Bills Support

The Council reserves the right to amend the HSF3 qualifying periods if demand for the scheme makes it necessary to either shorten or extend the qualifying periods.

Awards

Only one award will be made per household. The term 'household' is as defined in section 3 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992

Where multiple applications are received for the same household, the award will be made to the applicant that the Council decides is entitled first, irrespective of which application was received first.

Awards will be made by BACS to the applicant's bank account.

The value of an award will be £100

Once funds have been exhausted no further awards will be made. Applications that have been received before funds were exhausted but not yet decided will be refused on the basis that there are no funds with which to make payment. While the Council will aim to decide applications based on the date they were received, this could mean that an application received earlier in the process could be refused because of lack of funds while an application received later in the process has already been awarded.

Application process

The applicant will submit an online form. Where they are unable to submit a form electronically and cannot access assistance to do this, a telephone application will be accepted

Applicants will need to provide the following as a minimum:

- Name, address, date of birth of applicant and their partner
- Which benefit(s) they receive
- State which date entitlement started from
- Confirm whether they have already received a cost of living payment for low income/tax credits, disability or through the LA HSF3 scheme already
- Confirm they are liable for energy fuel for the property in which they live
- Bank details for payment to be made to

The scheme will accept applications from 1st November 2022 to 31 January 2023. The Council reserves the right to close the scheme early if it deems it necessary to do so, for example if funds are exhausted.

Verification

The application will be verified through various channels including

- DWP customer information system (Searchlight)
- Provision of evidence such as bank statements and proof of liability for energy fuel
- Information held by the local authority such as Benefit and Council Tax records
- Automated bank validation at point of completing the online form to confirm name of bank and that it is a valid account number

The applicant will be expected to provide any information required to support their application

Decisions

When a decision is made on a claim the applicant will be notified in writing.

If all information is not submitted as requested with the application form then the Council may decide to refuse the application. Where additional information is required that was not set out at the point of applying, the Council will contact the applicant to advise them of the information required. They will be given 10 working days to submit the information. If it is not submitted within the timescale, the application will be refused.

If an application from a different member of the same household is awarded during the period the first applicant is given to submit additional information, then the first applicant will be refused

Example – Applicant A submits an application form on 4 Oct 2022. Applicant B submits an application form on 10 Oct 2022. Upon reviewing Applicant A's form the Council identifies additional information is required, and on 9 Oct 2022 writes to Applicant A to advise them of this. On 13 Oct 2022 the Council reviews Applicant B's form, decides they qualify and issues an award. Applicant A will be refused an award even if they would have qualified had Applicant B not applied.

Overpayments

Any amounts paid which are later found to have been awarded incorrectly will be recovered.

Appeals

There will be no right to appeal the decision

Quality Assurance

All payments will be approved by a Senior Assessment Officer

A 10% quality check of all successful applications will be carried out by a manager

Policy review

The policy will be subject to periodic review by the Corporate Director of Resources or their authorised officer

Combatting fraud

In order to ensure that applications for funding are not subject to abuse, all submitted applications will require a statutory declaration of truth, a statement regarding data processing and a recovery of funds statement. This declaration allows for the Council, through its corporate anti-fraud team, to carry out post payment checks in order to give greater assurance that the funds were claimed correctly. The declaration will carry a warning that allows the Council to consider taking criminal action against persons who have been found to have deliberately made false applications for the funding. It also allows for the recovery of funds which have been paid based on false or inaccurate information.

All awards will be made within existing compliance procedures and policies that apply to the Council's financial systems.

Table 3 provides the proposed funding levels for vulnerable households

Table 3: Proposed Funding for vulnerable households

Category	Estimated No of Households	Proposed Funding per Household	Provisional Allocation of Funding (£)
Households on Housing Benefit only	1626	100	162,600
Care leavers moving to temporary accommodation	110	100	11,000
No Recourse to Public Funds	27	55	1485
Self Neglect & Hoarding	100	55	5500
Application based scheme	3000	100	302000

Funding for other sources of support

Help Harrow

Up to £140,000k of funding will be allocated to Help Harrow to support provision of food parcels and winter warmth packs to Harrow residents. Any household can self-refer by registering with the service to access support or turning up to the food market. Residents who have received assistance through other elements of the scheme are not restricted from receiving support from Help Harrow. The number of awards is not limited so the service can provide assistance over a longer period of time where required, and therefore not only assisting with urgent needs for food but also freeing up household funds to cover essentials other than food.

Rent Arrears

Any underspend can be allocated to rent arrears. Eligible households will be identified through proactive action by the Council's Housing Department according to the following criteria:

- Support with rent arrears is only eligible where no other provision is available including Housing Benefit, Universal Credit or Discretionary Housing Payments.
- The award would prevent households from facing court action, eviction and secure their tenancy
- The household engages with the Council to prevent further debts arising
- Council tenants who are single people or those with disabilities
- Households in emergency & temporary accommodation and targeted at those who are vulnerable.

Awards would be distributed directly to resident's rent account / landlord

Once funds have been exhausted no further awards will be made.

Multiple Claims

Households may receive awards from multiple elements of the Household Support Fund 3.