

Household Support Fund

1. What is the Household Support Fund?

We know that sudden unexpected costs can create real challenges for our residents who are experiencing financial hardship. The Household Support Fund is available to provide rapid short-term financial support to meet immediate needs and help those who are struggling to afford food, energy and water bills, and other related essentials this winter.

The scheme runs until 31st March 2022 and is designed to help ease financial pressure on residents with low incomes and to support those most in need this winter whilst the economy recovers.

Due to the limited amount of funds we have available, we will prioritise items necessary for day to day living such as food and essential household items.

We recognise that we cannot predict every challenge that residents may face, so we will be accepting applications for other essential types of support which cannot be budgeted for and which deliver on the aims of this scheme. These items will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

2. Who is eligible?

Our eligibility criteria balances supporting as many residents as we can with targeting our limited funds to support those who need our help the most.

Applicants must:

1. Be over the age of 16; and
2. Live in the District (as your main residence); and
3. Be without sufficient resources to meet the immediate short-term needs of themselves or dependents.

3. What will not be awarded?

Not every application will be awarded. The scheme will not award:

- Mortgage support - however homeowners could still qualify for the other elements of the Fund (such as food, energy, 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.

4. How will payments be made?

If you have been awarded a payment, we will normally provide vouchers or make payments via invoices being sent directly to East Devon District Council. (e.g. supermarket e-vouchers will be supplied to the applicant via e-mail, or payment for a taxi to a medical appointment will be invoiced to the

Council). In exceptional circumstances a cash payment may be made after all other means of payment have been explored (this cannot be paid into a third-party account). All awards from the fund will be made as quickly as possible to meet the agreed needs of the household. We also reserve the right to provide 'in-kind' support where this is appropriate.

5. How do I apply?

Applications may be made online or by telephone. There is telephone support available for those who require assistance to complete the form. Applications can be made by the applicant or their appointee, carer, advocate or a third party acting on their behalf. We also allow direct referrals from trusted partners through our online application system.

6. What information will I need to provide?

In order to make an assessment of the household needs and priorities, the Council will require some information to be provided. This may include details of who is living within the household, income and details of any savings, and the circumstances and reasons that led to an application being made. We will also need some practical information, such as National Insurance numbers and contact details.

The information provided on the application form may be sufficient to make an assessment, however in some instances further information in the form of evidence may be necessary to support the application such as bank statements.

7. Assessment process

Once a completed application is received, the details will be passed on to an advisor within our Financial Resilience Team. The advisor will make contact with the applicant via telephone to discuss the situation in further detail, as well as using the information provided in the application form and any other information available to them. The advisor will also take into account all of the circumstances and reasons that led to an application being made.

In making a decision on whether to make an award from the scheme and the amount to be awarded the advisor will consider the eligibility criteria and our approach to prioritisation, as well as the funds that we have available at the time of application. Once we have assessed whether the application falls within our eligibility criteria, we will consider whether the applicant meets one or more of our prioritisation criteria.

Our advisors will also consider all the information at their disposal to assess the risk faced by the applicant and the relative priority of their application including:

- Financial circumstances
- Access to other forms of financial support
- Circumstances and reasons for the claim

- Preventative measures taken by the applicant or partner
- Impact of making or not making of the award
- The budgetary situation of the fund

If the advisor feels that there are sufficient grounds for an award to be made based on priority and vulnerability they will then consider the amount of the award.

8. Calculating the amount of an award

As part of the application, you will be asked to give an indication of the support that is required. However, the assessing advisor will determine the amount of support based on local economic factors and arrangements in place with other agencies/retailers. It will not always be possible to provide the full amount due to the limited funds we have available.

9. Advising you of a decision

Once the advisor has made a decision on your application we will give you a written notice advising you:

- Whether an award has been made and the reason for the decision
- The intended use of the award
- The amount of the award

We will also let you know about other services in the council and the community which may be able to provide further support. We will also advise you as to how the award will be made.

10. Reviewing unsuccessful applications

The scheme is discretionary and there are no appeal rights to an Independent Tribunal, but you can ask us to look at your case again within 5 days of our decision if you are not happy with the outcome of your application. Requests for a review of our decision need to be made in writing. It must state the reasons why you are asking for a review of the decision and be signed and dated.

You will be notified of the review decision within 14 days of your request. This decision will be final. If you do not have access to a computer, you can get in touch with us and we will advise you on how you can request a review.

11. How often can I apply?

Support will usually be provided from the fund once. In exceptional circumstances repeat applications will be considered on merit. In the case of repeat applications further work and referrals to other agencies will be discussed with the applicant and may be conditional on having further financial support (e.g. referrals to Citizens Advice)

12. Other information about the scheme

The Household Support Fund is a fixed amount of money made available to local authorities by the Department for Work and Pensions to be used to support households in the most need with food, energy and water bills this winter. As funds are limited, the council will prioritise those households facing the greatest need. The scheme is due to run until 31st March 2022 but once all funds have been allocated, the fund will be closed. In order to maximise the support we can provide to all our residents we will always redirect residents to other forms of support where we feel this is more appropriate to support their needs.

In line with the principles of good administration, all applications will be treated fairly and consistently under the terms we have set out here. Applications will be processed in a timely manner.

We will monitor this scheme on an ongoing basis. We will regularly review the scheme to ensure that we are making the best use of the money we have available. To support our monitoring and evaluation, we may get in touch with applicants after decisions on awards have been made in order to ask for feedback about the scheme and may also share your data with other colleagues in the council to support our monitoring and evaluation of the scheme.

13. How will we use & share your information

The Council will only collect data relevant to your Household Support Fund application. Your data will be held on our digital platform and will be protected using up-to-date technical and organisational security measures.

Your data will be used to:

- Determine your eligibility for the Household Support Fund
- Contact you about decisions or updates related to an application
- Issue the Household Support Fund payment to your nominated Bank or Building Society account where appropriate

Your personal data will not be kept longer than necessary (in line with our existing retention schedule).

Information collected during the application process will be used to assess an applicants' claim. Information will be cross matched with other data held by the Council and third-party agencies e.g. Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), HM Revenue & Customs (HMRC) for verification purposes.

The Council may also share data with both internal and external organisations for the purposes of validating any applications you may make or have made

for other Council services such as Housing Applications, School Placements, Homeless Applications.

In addition, we may also share your data within the organisation to support our efforts to redirect you to other support that may be available (for example our Discretionary Housing Payment Scheme, Council Tax Reduction Scheme).

We may also share your data within the organisation or with other Government agencies in order to prevent and/or detect potentially fraudulent activity. Subject to a legal gateway, your information may also be shared for the prevention of fraud and criminal activity with (list not exhaustive):

- The police
- Immigration Service, Absconder Services and/or UK Border Agency
- Health and social care organisations
- Other Local Authorities

14. Fraud

The Council is committed to tackling and preventing fraud in all its forms. If a claimant attempts to claim an award from the Household Support Fund by making a false declaration or providing false evidence or statements, they may have committed an offence under the Theft Act 1968. Where the Council suspects that fraud may have occurred it will investigate the matter as appropriate, and this may lead to criminal proceedings.

15. Where can I get help with other costs that aren't included within the Fund?

The Department for Work and Pensions are responsible for providing a number of payments and advances for those who meet the eligibility criteria. These include:

- Funeral Payments
- Sure Start Maternity Grant
- Winter Fuel and Cold Weather Payments
- Short-term Benefit Advances • Budgeting Advances

For further information please speak to your local JobCentre Plus office.

16. What other support is available?

Further information on what financial support is available for individuals and families in Devon can be found at <https://www.devon.gov.uk/coronavirus-advice-in-devon/document/support-for-people-and-families/>