

Household Support Fund - England

Fund extension 1 April 2022 to 30 September 2022 – Key criteria, how it affects carers and request for practice

Summary

The final guidance for the Household Support Fund was published on 29 April 2022 and can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/household-support-fund-guidance-for-local-councils/household-support-fund-final-guidance-for-county-councils-and-unitary-authorities-in-england>

It runs from 1 April 2022 to 30 September 2022 and £421 million been given to local authorities in England with discretion as to how they distribute.

£79 million has been awarded to the devolved administrations under the Barnett Formula, £41 million for the Scottish Government, £21 million for the Welsh Government and £14 million for the Northern Ireland Executive. It is up to these administrations how the funding is spent.

Carers are noted within the document as a potential group who could be supported.

What is the Fund to be used for?

The expectation of Government is that that it should:

- *“Primarily be used to support households most in need particularly those including children and pensions who would otherwise struggle with energy bills, food and water bills.”*
- *“Energy bills may be of particular concern to low income households... and local authorities should especially consider how they can support households with the cost of energy”.*
- *“It can also be used to support households with essential costs related to those items and wider essential costs.”*
- *“In exceptional cases of genuine emergency it can additionally be used to support housing costs where housing schemes do not meet this exceptional need.”*

The guidance suggests, under para. 5, that local authorities should use the widest range of data possible and work with the DWP to get this for their local area. Please see our section on data sharing and “what should you be asking”.

Carers are mentioned as one of the groups that could be targeted because they cannot easily increase their earnings through work:

*“Authorities should particularly consider how they can support low income households that cannot increase their income through work, such as pensioners, people with disabilities, **unpaid carers** and parents of very young children in their area.”*

This is not just limited to benefits recipients. *“Support is not restricted to vulnerable households in receipt of benefits. Therefore, Authorities should also use other sources of information to identify vulnerable households, including advice from professionals who come into contact with vulnerable households such as social workers and Supporting Families advisors.”*

The grant can be distributed through vouchers, direct provision of food or goods, or through third parties.

Carers UK's view:

We welcome the inclusion of carers as being a group not necessarily able to increase work to help with costs and the fact that a vulnerable household may not be on low incomes.

Eligible spend

The Government guidance states that the criteria **have** to be clearly set out by the local authority but should cover:

- **Energy and water** – including energy used for domestic heating, cooking, lighting, etc. as well as water bills.
 - Carers had told that they have any additional costs for medical equipment including fans during the summer if heat is a challenge for someone with a disability. Carers often have higher washing and cleaning bills.
- **Food** – this could be in kind, vouchers or cash.
 - Many carers told us about specific foods needed by the person they cared for e.g. specific brands for autistic children or adults with very particular eating requirements, or people needing particular foods for their condition. We would urge flexibility to ensure that whatever method is used, the particular needs of the family are met.
- **Essentials related to energy** including sanitary products, warm clothing, soap, blankets, boiler service/repair, purchase of equipment including fridges, freezers, ovens, etc.
 - This clearly related to a number of costs faced by carers on low incomes.
- **Wider essentials where they are not linked to energy or water.** It is for the local authority to decide what is appropriate but could include: broadband or phone bills, clothing, and essential transport-related costs such as repairing a car, buying a bicycle or paying for fuel.
 - Carers UK has evidence of the essential use of the internet during the pandemic – given that so many care arrangements, tech supported care, etc. are made online this is now critical and we welcome this inclusion. Many carers have also raised petrol costs as a key issue – whether they live with the person they care for or not. Paying petrol costs could make the difference between a person continuing to care by travelling every day or not.
- **Housing costs** – there are details within the document about this.

Carers UK recommends the following if it is not already happening:

- Clarity within the criteria and where carers are included. All local authorities must have clear published eligibility criteria and how the scheme can be accessed.
- Have examples where carers are not in receipt of certain benefits but might be vulnerable e.g. costs of equipment in relation to eligible spend.

- Ensure that definitions and terms used to the public or to professionals not used to working with carers relate to them to maximise identification.

Maximising incomes through connected advice provision

Although reasonable administration costs are included in allowable local authority spend, **advice provision is not funded** through the Household Support Grant (source Q&A). This is disappointing as it would be an opportunity to maximise carers' incomes through other means. However, we encourage local authorities, working with carers' organisations and others to use this opportunity to:

- Pro-actively use mechanisms to ensure carers' benefits entitlements and welfare checks maximise entitlement.
- Highlight the earnings limit for Carer's Allowance, including allowable deductions, if some carers are able to work.
- Additional points are made below about transfer of data, UC and PC claimants.

We are pleased that local authorities are able to work with third parties, including passing on grant funding.

- Local authorities ensure close working with local carers' organisations, passing on grant funding where appropriate.

What data is being shared between DWP and local authorities?

DWP data sources can only be used where a local authority has a client's details and can verify whether they receive a certain benefit e.g. Universal Credit (UC).

However, the DWP are sharing some data more comprehensively. This includes regular data about UC claimants who are under the income threshold for free prescriptions, who are entitled to free school meals, have limited capability for work or subject to the benefit cap. The data would include the NI number and name, but not the address of the claimant.

DWP is sharing more comprehensive regular data on Pension Credit households with local authorities (source Q&A) including the Guarantee Credit and Savings Credit elements. These data include names and addresses of claimants.

Carers UK has clarified the status of data transfer to local authorities and it is limited to the above. Whilst some carers will be in receipt of UC and Pension Credit, they will not be identifiable in the data set as a distinct group if they receive Carer's Allowance, Carer Element or Carer Addition.

As with our statements during the COVID-19 vaccination programme, in the future we would like to get to a place where data transfers are simpler between DWP and local authorities, allowing carers to be identified quicker and signposted to support. We continue to ask DWP to consider ways in which carers might be linked up to support faster.

Carers UK recommends:

- It is vital that local authorities work pro-actively with local carers' organisations to ensure that they are able to identify carers from vulnerable households who might be entitled to a grant.
- That communications with people entitled to UC and Pension Credit are used pro-actively to identify
 - a) people new to caring who might be able to claim additional income e.g. Carer's Allowance, Carer Element and Carer Addition in Pension Credit and
 - b) people who might not have realised they could claim additional income who might have been caring for some time.

Using advice and identification to join up services and support for carers

There is a huge opportunity to identify carers to ensure that they are registered with their GP. Early February 2022 guidance suggested carers would be able to request a free flu jab. We are still waiting to see whether the JCVI includes carers as part of the criteria for the Autumn COVID-19 booster scheme. Carers UK has been advocating strongly that carers should be included. The more that services and advice are linked up the reduced likelihood of carers falling within gaps between services.

Carers UK recommends:

- That all public bodies or third parties working on this help carers to identify themselves and refer to support, including registration with their GP practice as a carer. This would need the correct consents being sought.
- Proactive identification and referral would directly contribute to positive public health outcomes.
- This would also recognise caring as a social determinant of health, as identified by the Office of Health Improvement and Disparities and would help deliver the local authorities' prevention duties under the Care Act 2014, where the NHS has a duty to cooperate.

Questions to ask

- Is there a definition of carers?
- Are examples given of low income carers who are and are not on key benefits to illustrate how grants might help?
- Do all the people administering the scheme understand the definition of "carer" and know how to promote this to the public by using an explanation rather than the term "carer" directly?
- Is there income maximisation running alongside this programme? E.g. for pensioners and for people on means-tested benefits?
- Are all efforts being used to ensure that any non-identified carers on key benefits are being identified and encouraged to claim Carer's Allowance?
- Is the local carers organisation engaged?
- Are all efforts being used to join up services e.g. refer to the local carers organisation and ensure the carer registers with their GP practice as a carer.

Request for evidence

- How is your local area supporting carers with the cost of living?
- Do you have good examples of where the Household Support Grant is being used to support unpaid carers?
- Please contact policy@carersuk.org with any examples

Contact

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