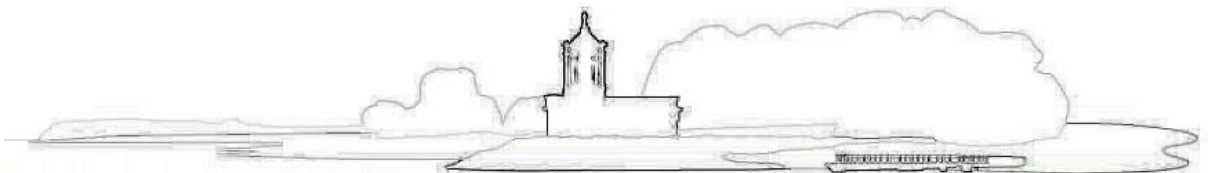


Rutland County Council

Household Support Fund Policy 2023-24

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Summary of document

The policy applies to the Household Support Fund as announced by central government on 17th November 2022 (Autumn Statement) for the period 1st April 2023 to 31st March 2024. The policy sets out to achieve a fair and robust approach to the award and allocation of the Household Support Fund.

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 In response to the ongoing global inflationary challenges and the significant rising cost of living, the Government announced there would be support to help the hardest hit families and individuals. The expectation is that funding should primarily be used to support households most in need with food, energy, and water bills.
- 1.2 Originally, the Government provided a Household Support Fund Grant to cover the period 6th October 2021 to 31st March 2022. The scheme was extended several times with the most current scheme ending on 31 March 2023.
- 1.3 Guidance was issued on 21st February 2023. Rutland County Council has been allocated £314,742 funding for the scheme from 1st April 2023 to 31st March 2024.
- 1.4 This policy sets out the Council's approach of reflecting the key principles of the Household Support Fund and our eligibility criteria.

2.0 LEGISLATION

- 2.1 Local authorities will be responsible for delivering grants to eligible households. The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) will provide funding under section 31 of The Local Government Act 2003.
- 2.2 The DWP have issued guidance called 'Household Support Fund: - guidance for local councils'. The guidance can be found here <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/household-support-fund-guidance-for-local-councils>
- 2.3 Local authorities have discretion on exactly how this funding is used within the scope set out in the guidance. This policy sets out how this will work for Rutland County Council.
- 2.4 The Household Support Fund will be delivered over a number of months in order to capture and support as many eligible households as possible prior to the fund closing on 31 March 2024.

3.0 POLICY AIM

- 3.1 The policy aims to support vulnerable households in most need of support with the cost of food, energy (heating, cooking, lighting) water bills (including sewerage) and wider essential costs.
- 3.2 The DWP have encouraged Council's to adopt the following principles which has formed the basis of our approach:

- Use of discretion on how to identify and support those most in need, taking into account a wide range of information;
 - Use the funding to meet immediate needs and help those who are struggling to afford energy, food and water bills, and other related essentials and wider essential costs.
 - Use the fund to cover a wide range of low income households in need including families with children of all ages, pensioners, unpaid carers, care leavers and disabled people.
 - In exceptional cases of genuine emergency, use the fund to support housing costs where existing housing support schemes do not meet this exceptional need;
 - Work together with other with District Councils including, where necessary and appropriate, other local services, such as social and care workers to help identify and support households within the scope of the scheme.
- 3.3 Funding from 1st April 2023 to 31st March 2024 can be distributed as the authority sees fit, providing individuals can self-refer. There will be an online application process to facilitate this.
- 3.4 Should the Council have no funds remaining after making initial payments, then all other applications will be rejected.
- 3.5 The Council reserves the right to change or adapt the policy according to the available funds and changes made to the Governments guidance.

4.0 ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA FOR THE HOUSEHOLD SUPPORT FUND

Food vouchers for households with school aged children

- 4.1 Families and individuals of school age children who attend a school or college in Rutland, will be provided with a food voucher, if they are currently eligible for free school meals. The vouchers will be issued via the child's school and will cover the following terms breaks:

Term	Amount per break per child*
Easter 2023	£35.00
Spring half-term 2023	£15.00
Summer 2023	£75.00
October half-term 2023	£30.00
Christmas 2023	£40.00
February half term 2024	£15.00

*the amounts may be subject to change depending on available funding

- 4.2 The voucher will be for a set amount per child, per break and will be paid as a voucher before the start of each break.
- 4.3 There may be reciprocal arrangements in place whereby children who live in Rutland and attend schools out of our county receive vouchers

from their school if they are in receipt of free school meals in accordance with the Household Support Fund Policy for the relevant Local Authority.

One-off Payments for eligible households

- 4.4 The Council will provide one household support payment to households who have been identified as meeting the following criteria:
- Be a household living in Rutland on 1st September 2023;
 - The applicant or their partner is in receipt of Local Council Tax Support on 1/9/2023;
 - The household has savings of less than £5,000; and
 - At least one of the following categories:
 - Be of working age or pension age with children under school admission age (aged 0-4); or
 - Be of working age (under 65) without children; or
 - At least one person in the household is of pensionable age
- 4.5 One payment for £100* will be made in September 2023. We expect half is to be spent on food and half is to be spent on energy and water bills, unless the applicant advises us that it has been spent on one of the other eligible categories (see section 5). (*the amount may be subject to change)
- 4.6 Eligible Households will receive a Post Office Payout voucher to redeem at their local Post Office.

One-off payment to Care Leavers

- 4.7 The Council will provide one payment of £100* to care leavers (as defined in the Children's Act 1989 as amended) in September 2023. The payment will be organised in conjunction with their allocated Personal Adviser. (*the amount may be subject to change)

5.0 FUNDING USE

- 5.1 As defined in the guidance eligible spend includes:
- **Energy and water-** the fund should primarily be used to support with energy bills for heating cooking, lighting and water bills for drinking, washing, cooking, sanitation and sewerage
 - **Food-** the fund should primarily be used to provide support with food through vouchers or cash.
 - **Essentials linked to energy and water-** the fund can be used to provide essentials including, sanitary products, warm clothing, soap, blankets, boiler service/repair, purchase of fridges, freezers, ovens etc.

- **Wider essentials-** the fund can be used to support with wider essentials e.g., other household bills, clothing, repairs.
- **Housing costs-** the fund can be used only in exceptional circumstances where existing schemes do not meet this exceptional need as deemed necessary by the Council. This also applies to historic rent arrears.
- The fund cannot be used to provide mortgage support, in such cases the homeowner should contact their lender.

5.2 We are able to retain c5-10% of the funding for administration costs.

5.3 The following table details the funding distribution by cohort. This may be subject to change based on demand and any underspend in vouchers and other awards.

Distribution group	Cohort	Total	% of grant
1. Households with children	Vouchers for food for school age children during school breaks	£144,525	46%
2. Households with children	Households with at least 1 child under school admission age	£5,200	1.5%
3. Households with pensioners	Pension age households in receipt of Local Council Tax Support	£67,900	21.5%
4. Households with disabled people	Households with at least one person in receipt of a disability related benefit	£23,200	7%
5. Other Households	Households without children in receipt of Local Council Tax Support	17,400	5.5%
6. Other Households	Application process	£15,000	5%
7. Other Households	Care Leavers	£4,800	1.5%
n/a	Administration cost	£31,474	10%
	Total*	£309,499	98%

*Distribution reflects an underspend of £5,243. The exact funding distribution will be reviewed regularly throughout the year.

6.0 AWARD DISTRIBUTION PROCESS

- 6.1 Food vouchers will be issued to schools for distribution to households who are eligible for free school meals prior to the end of each term. Unused vouchers may be redistributed at a later date.
- 6.2 Households who are identified as eligible for a household support payment will receive a letter from the Post Office.
- 6.3 Individuals who consider that they are eligible and have not received a letter from the Post office should email localtaxation@rutland.gov.uk in the first instance or call Customer Services on 01572 722577.
- 6.4 Those individuals who do not meet the eligibility criteria detailed at Point 4, but who need support can apply through our application process detailed in 7 below.

7.0 APPLICATION PROCESS

- 7.1 Household who are eligible for a payment detailed at Point 4 do not need to apply. The Council will use data it already holds to identify and contact eligible households.
- 7.2 Households can complete an online application form if they can demonstrate and provide supporting evidence for the following:
 - extenuating circumstances e.g. the impact of the cost of living crisis is above that of the average household; or
 - experiencing financial hardship e.g. recent reduction in working hours; or
 - pay higher energy bills than the average household;and
 - have household combined savings of less than £5,000; and
 - the household has a low income; (refer to point 7.3)

The following are examples of circumstances that would be considered for an award:

- A member of the household had a long term health condition. E.g. someone needs home oxygen therapy which is dependent on using a constant supply of fuel to operate
- The household is large and has higher energy bills e.g. 5+ people
- The property is not energy efficient e.g. lack of double glazing, not on dual fuel or not on mains supply, has an EPC band F or G rating
- Households that are on a low income but just above the threshold to claim state benefits such as Universal Credit

- 7.3 The Council will determine if the household is in low income if they live on less than 60% of the median income standard in the UK. A low income household has a combined gross annual income of less than £26,000 per year.
- 7.4 The applicants will need to provide evidence to support their application. This can include recent bank statements for all adults of working age in the household displaying all transactions for 1 month, utility bills, evidence of health conditions.
- 7.4 The Council will also accept referrals from Council Officer (e.g. social Workers) and trusted partners. E.g. Rutland Citizens Advice Bureau.
- 7.5 The Council will run a number of application windows throughout the year. Details of which will be published on our website.

8.0 CANCELLATION AND REPAYMENT

- 8.1 The vouchers and payments are made in good faith and on the understanding that households will report changes in their circumstance that affect their entitlement to Local Council Tax Support. We will not accept deliberate manipulation and fraud. Any applicant caught falsifying their records or failing to report a change to gain Household Support Fund money will face prosecution and any vouchers or awards issued will be subject to claw back, as may be any awards paid in error.
- 8.2 Post payment assurance checks may be undertaken. The Governments Counter Fraud Function may support local authorities to carry out post-event assurance work to identify high risk payments.

9.0 COMPLAINTS AND APPEALS

- 9.1 No formal appeal rights exist. However, in the interests of natural justice it is regarded as good practice for local authorities to establish a mechanism to allow appeals to be heard.
- 9.2 If an aggrieved applicant wishes to make an appeal against a decision made under this policy, then they will need to write to the Revenues and Benefits Manager within 14 days of notification of the refusal by email to enquiries@rutland.gov.uk
- 9.3 Appeals will be forwarded to the Strategic Director for Resources who will consider the appeal. The applicant will be notified of the decision electronically and this decision will be final.

**A large print version of this document is
available on request**



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