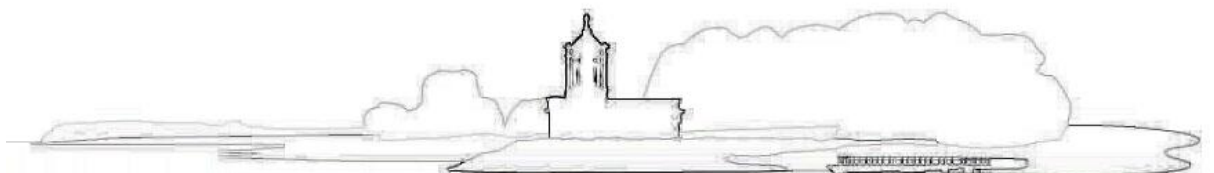




Rutland County Council

Household Support Fund Policy 1 October 2024 to 31 March 2025 (Part 2)

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Summary of document

The policy applies to the Household Support Fund as announced by central government on 6 March 2024 (Spring Budget) for the period 1 October 2024 to 31 March 2025. 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 2024.
- 1.3 Guidance was issued on 26 March 2024. Rutland County Council has been allocated £157,371.07 funding for the scheme from 1 April 2024 to 30 September 2024. Further funding was announced for 1 October 2024 to 31 March 2025, for the same amount.
- 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 the 6 months period in order to capture and support as many eligible households as possible prior to the fund closing.

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 and bills.
- 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, considering 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 local authorities 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 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 voucher for food and school related essentials, 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*
Autumn term break 2024	£30.00
Christmas break 2024	£50.00
February term break 2025	£20.00

*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.

White Goods for eligible households

4.4 Rutland Citizens Advice Bureau (CAR) will operate a scheme to provide white goods to households most in need, to provide support that has a long-term sustainable impact to reduce bills in the long term, who meet the following criteria:

- Be a household living in Rutland between 1 October 2024 and 15 March 2025;
- The applicant or their partner is in receipt of Local Council Tax Support, Universal Credit, Pension Credit (or receiving other state benefits at the discretion of CAR) between 1 October 2024 and 15 March 2025;
- The household has savings of less than £3,000;

and

- have an item that needs to be repaired or replaced and in doing so will reduce household expenses due to efficiency or:
- the purchase of the item will make a significant impact on the health and wellbeing of a household member that would otherwise incur higher costs of living; and

4.5 A limit of 2 white goods per household within the 6 month- period of the scheme will apply.

4.6 The most suitable item will be provided based on the size of the household and usage. Households will be unable to specify a particular brand, style or model. CAR will determine the most appropriate item considering need, use and energy efficiency.

4.7 No cash alternative will be offered.

4.8 Ordering, delivery, and installation will be arranged by a local supplier and standard manufacturers warranties will apply.

4.9 Recipients are advised to register any warranties or guarantees in case of fault or breakdown as a replacement will not be provided for misuse of any product.

4.10 Once the funds have been depleted, no further awards will be made.

4.11 White goods that are part of the scheme are as follows:

Item	Description/rational
Air Fryer	Suitable for cooking meals at lower cost than conventional cooking methods
Microwave	Suitable for cooking meals at lower cost than conventional cooking methods
Washing Machine	Washing clothes efficiently at lower temperatures

Clothes dryer	Drying clothes efficiently without using a tumble dryer
Refrigerator or fridge/freezer	Storing food for longer enabling meal planning and batch cooking
Other white goods	At the discretion of CAR based on need and impact

One-off payment to Care Leavers

- 4.12 The Council will provide one payment of £250* to care leavers (as defined in the Children’s Act 1989 as amended) in December 2024. The payment will be organised by Childrens Services Support.

*the amount may be subject to change

Pensioners missing out on Winter Fuel Payments

- 4.13 Officers will use Council Tax Support data and DWP data to identify pensioners who are likely to be missing out on the winter fuel allowance and aren’t eligible to claim Pension Credit but are still on a low income.

- 4.14 Officers will write to those identified and ask for bank detail information to enable a one-off payment of £200* to be made. This will happen after the cut-off point for applying for Pension Credit of 21st December 2024, in order to be eligible to receive a Winter Fuel Allowance payment.

*the amount may be subject to change

One-off payment to clear Council Tax arrears

- 4.15 Officers will undertake an audit of council tax accounts to consider if any arrears can be remitted by using HSF to alleviate the pressure from households of paying old debts.

- 4.15 A report will be prepared for the Strategic Director of Resources to approve in March 2025, subject to funding being available. The emphasis will be to support taxpayers who are able to pay their current bill but are struggling to pay their aged debts. The amount will vary per award.

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 though 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
1. Households with children	Vouchers for food for school age children during school breaks	79,000
2. Households on a low income	white goods to reduce cost of living in the longer term	10,000
3. Households on a low income	Application process	16,000
4. Other Households	Care Leavers	10,000
5. Pensioners	Pensioners missing out on Winter Fuel Payments	25,200
6. Households on a low income	Households in arrears with Council Tax and limited or no means to pay the debt	6,155
n/a	Administration cost	11,016
	Total*	£157,371

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 if time permits.
- 6.2 CAR will operate the white goods provision on behalf of the Council.
- 6.3 Those individuals who do not meet the eligibility criteria detailed at Point 4.1 and 4.12, 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 4.1, 4.12, 4.13 and 4.14 do not need to apply. The Council will issue awards directly.
- 7.2 CAR will identify households who are eligible for white goods during their usually contact and referral process. Individuals are able to self-refer for white goods by completing a crisis application form which is available here [Emergency financial help | Rutland County Council](#)
- 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 £3,000; 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
- 6.3 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.
- 6.4 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. Details of which will be published on our website.

8.0 CANCELLATION AND REPAYMENT

- 8.1 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 or goods 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 Head of Customer Experience 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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