



Household Support Fund

Proposal for North Northamptonshire Council and West Northamptonshire Council

About the Fund

The [Household Support Fund](#), announced by the Department for Work and Pensions on the 30th September 2021, is the third iteration of the COVID Winter Grant Scheme that was originally launched in November 2020. The DWP has made available these funds “to support those most in need this winter during the final stages of economic recovery.”

The DWP has given local authorities a wide discretion on how these funds should be used, which is to support those most in need. “The expectation is that it should primarily be used to support households in the most need with food, energy and water bills. It can also be used to support households with essential costs related to those items and with wider essential costs.”

The latest fund can be delivered between the 6th October 2021 and 31st March 2022. In line with previous iterations, there is a stipulation that that a minimum of 50% of the fund must be used to support families with children.

North Northamptonshire Council (NNC) and West Northamptonshire Council (WNC) have been initially allocated a combined sum of £5,065,120.50. Payment for the grant will be made in arrears, following the submission of spending returns to the DWP in February (for the period to 31st January) and April (for the full length of the scheme). When split (by COVID Relative Needs Formula split of W 50.48% and N 49.52%), each authority has been allocated:

North Northamptonshire Council	£ 2,508,247.67
West Northamptonshire Council	£ 2,556,872.83

Proposal

We propose that awards are provided between 1st November and the 31st March, through the following three schemes:

Firstly, that the North and West Authorities issue vouchers to the families of Free School Meal recipients for school holiday periods. NNC and WNC have already committed to the 2021 school holidays (October and December), each holiday period costing around £450,000. There remains a decision, regarding the option to issue vouchers for the February and Easter holidays, costing an additional c£450,000 per authority.

Secondly, a scheme to issue food and energy top-up vouchers to households identified as vulnerable. Referrals for these funds will be submitted by teams in our local authorities, the Citizen’s Advice Bureau and Job Centre Plus are preferred. We propose awards are based on a household’s size to reflect the increased costs of running larger households.

Thirdly, establishing a ‘Fuel Bank’ in both North and West Northamptonshire. The Fuel Bank will distribute emergency energy meter top ups to the estimated 8,400 (16%) households in Northamptonshire that are self-disconnecting their energy supplies annually because they cannot afford to top up their meters. As the cost of utility bills rise this estimate may be increased significantly during 2021/2022.

Reasonable administration costs can be taken from the total allocation. It is anticipated that resource costs, partner administration, postage and promotion costs will be around 3% of the grant’s total.

As there have been other substantial grants awarded to vulnerable individuals during 2021 the Household Support Fund administrators will seek to ensure that multiple payments are minimised, unless in case of exceptional need.

Proposed Scope and Diversity of Funds Distribution:

	NNC	WNC	Notes
Grant Allocation	£2,508,248	£2,556,873	Split by COVID Relative Needs Formula
2021 School Holiday Food Vouchers	£ 457,110	£ 451,710	Agreed and committed spend by both authorities
<i>Funds Remaining</i>	£ 2,051,138	£ 2,105,163	after committed spend

	NNC	WNC	Notes
Grant Allocation c/fwd	£2,051,138	£2,105,163	Split by COVID Relative Needs Formula
Winter Fuel Bank	£ 168,000	£ 168,000	8,400 @ £40 emergency energy top-ups
Grant Administration	£ 75,247	£ 76,706	Estimated at 3%. Breakdown below
<i>Funds Remaining</i>	£1,807,891	£1,860,457	after Winter Fuel Bank and Admin

	NNC	WNC	Notes
Grant Allocation c/fwd	£1,807,891	£1,860,457	Split by COVID Relative Needs Formula
Household Hardship Grants	£1,350,780	£1,408,747	Funds issued as Hardship Grants
Est. Grant Volumes	5,403	5,635	CWGS £250 average award.
<i>Funds Remaining</i>	£457,111	£451,710	after Household Hardship Grants

	NNC	WNC	Notes
Grant Allocation c/fwd	£457,111	£451,710	Split by COVID Relative Needs Formula
2022 School Holiday Food Vouchers (Feb/April 2022) (if agreed upon)	£ 457,111	£ 451,710	2021 summer volumes, +2% for new year additions

Proposal in Detail

School Holiday Food Vouchers

NNC and WNC have each committed to provide vouchers for the October and Christmas term breaks, at an approximate cost of £450,000 per authority. The family of eligible children will receive £15 per eligible child, per week. It is proposed these already committed costs are recovered from the grant.

It remains open to each authority to agree as to whether there will be an issuance of February half-term and Easter holiday vouchers through this scheme; at an approximate cost of £450,000 per authority. If either authority chooses not to extend the school holiday voucher issue, the balance can be used to increase the number of hardship vouchers available.

These school holiday food vouchers will be distributed by schools before each holiday period. Schools will submit a list of those children receiving free school meals. Both authorities will then provide a corresponding number of vouchers to each school for parents to distribute.

Household Hardship Grants

In order to provide direct assistance with food and energy, it is proposed that support is provided in the form of supermarket voucher and energy top-up credits for those with pre-payment meters. This provides reassurance that the grant funds are spent on the items for which they are needed.

Eligibility for the grant will be two-fold. Firstly, the applicant must have an income below 80% of the Minimum Income Standard published by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation. The [Minimum Income Standard](#) is published yearly, and “presents a vision of the living standards that we, as a society, consider everyone in the UK should be able to achieve.” Secondly, the application should be sponsored by a professional that has knowledge of a household’s circumstances through ‘casework’ type support.

These casework professionals will be used to identify need and sponsor an application. These professionals may include authorities’ benefits, money advice teams and social workers, Job Centre Plus and the Citizen’s Advice Bureau. The Citizen’s Advice Bureau can also offer budgeting and debt advice to people seeking support under this scheme. These sponsored applications will provide us the reassurance of a household’s genuine needs, having been submitted by a professional with in-depth knowledge of a household’s hardship.

Grant sizes will be based on a household’s size, to reflect the increased costs of running a larger household. It is proposed to continue the sizes issues in previous schemes, as the voucher sizes offer enough support to a household to work through a period of hardship. It is proposed that households can only receive one of these grants for the length of the scheme. The voucher sizes proposed are:

Single person	£120
2 people	£220
3 people	£300
4 or more people	£380

To ensure the scheme reaches the most vulnerable, we will direct community groups receiving funding through the other COVID funding streams to support those in need to access this scheme where appropriate.

‘Winter Fuel Bank’

A fuel bank works like a food bank, but offering emergency energy top-ups instead of food parcels.

15% of energy customers use prepayment meters (PPMs) in England and pre-COVID research shows that 16% of these customers are self-disconnecting each year because they are unable to afford to top-up their energy meters. This means that roughly 8,400 households in Northamptonshire are self-disconnecting due to lack of funds. Research becomes hard reading as 88% of these households contain a child or someone with a long-term health condition. The effects of the ongoing energy crisis and pandemic, is likely to increase demand.

We propose that a ‘Winter Fuel Bank’ is established in both North Northamptonshire and West Northamptonshire offering emergency £40 energy top-ups to those facing self-disconnection or forced between heating or eating.

As with most food banks, an independent referral will be required before a top-up is issued, but they should be issued same-day to avoid disconnection from heating during the cold winter months. These referrals will be made by the Household Grant partners above.

To ensure the scheme reaches the most vulnerable, we will direct community groups receiving funding through the other COVID funding streams to support those in need to access this scheme where appropriate.

Administration costs

We propose that a single team administers the grant. Both authorities will share the cost of this team, split by population.

The team will consist of 4 full-time equivalents, based on the expected levels of daily referrals for Household Grants and Fuel Bank schemes. These posts will be funded by the grant itself and be managed within the COVID Community Resilience Cell.

An additional £50,820 is set aside to support the Citizen’s Advice Bureau with admin costs associated with setting and running a referral service.

The remainder of the funds up to 3% are expected to be incurred through postage costs, IT changes and marketing efforts to foodbanks and community groups to extend the reach of the scheme.

4 administration FTEs for six months	£50,000
Citizen’s Advice Bureaux admin costs	Expected up to £50,820
IT Changes	Estimated £10,000
Comms	Estimated £6,000
Contingency	£35,133
	£151,953

Communication – a communication strategy will be developed locally to ensure that the communities are aware of support available and access points. The funding for all assets relating to HSF will be evaluated and if this exceeds the allowance stated the contingency fund will be accessed.

Any ‘unspent’ admin costs will be made available to be issued as Fuel Bank vouchers or Hardship Grants to ensure maximum utilization of the fund.

Management and Oversight

Delivery of the above schemes will be managed by the COVID Community Resilience Cell, overseen by the COVID 19 Programme Team.

Spend profile will be collated and presented to the Joint Leadership Team on a monthly basis, for information. Unless there are changes to the apportionment of funds escalation will not be required following approval of the Household Support Fund proposal.