



Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council
Household Support Fund Policy

2021/22



1. INTRODUCTION

The Government announced in early October 2021 the introduction of the Household Support Fund to support those in most need during the winter.

The funding covers the period 6th October 2021 to 31 March 2022 and can be used to provide support with the cost of food, utility bills (energy and water), other wider household costs deemed essential i.e. paying for broadband, mobile phone costs, boiler repairs etc. and supporting housing costs where the existing housing support schemes do not meet this exceptional need.

Support should be targeted to support the most vulnerable households

Sandwell will receive £3,471,442.28 funding from the Department for Work and Pensions. This funding allocation includes any reasonable costs associated with administering the scheme.

At least 50% of the funding must be spent on families with children and the other 50% on other households.

To support families who receive free school meals £1.67m will be used to provide food vouchers during the school holidays in October, December 2021, February and April 2022. This will provide additional support for around 18,700 households.

Funding for the Hardship Support Fund is limited to the amount provided by the DWP. Once funds have been exhausted no further awards can be made.

This policy sets out Sandwell's application of the scheme.

2. ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

The Hardship Support Fund is intended to support households during the winter who are most in need.

To be considered for support under this scheme residents must be:

- working age
- liable for Council Tax and or Rent in Sandwell

- receiving Universal Credit, Working Tax Credit, income-based Employment & Support Allowance, income-based Jobseeker's Allowance, Income Support, Housing Benefit, Council Tax reduction
- suffering financial hardship
- not have savings over £3k

If funding does allow we can consider Housing Support Fund payments for households not currently in receipt of DWP welfare benefits. This approach could be considered in application windows after the initial window from November to December.

3. APPLICATION PROCESS

Requests for assistance through this scheme can be made by either:

- The applicant completing an online request form or making a request over the telephone
- A third party organisation (including schools) referring a household to the council for support

In all cases the council will verify the identity and/or the residency of the applicant.

In all cases the applicant will be contacted to establish eligibility.

The scheme will allow an individual to obtain 1 award in each of the application windows up to a maximum of 3 during the period to 31 March 2022, if funding allows. The first application window will be from 10 November to 9 December

4. DECISION MAKING

The application process will gather all the information required to determine eligibility, type of support required and amount to be paid/goods to be provided.

In all cases where a referral is made the council will carry out checks to confirm the identity and/or the residency of the applicant.

Applications will be refused if the identity and/or residency of the applicant cannot be established.

Revenues and Benefits will consider each application and where successful determine the type and amount of support to be provided.

In all cases, applicants will be notified of the decision in writing

5. AMOUNT PAYABLE

Food Items

Where a household needs assistance with food the following amounts to cover a week's provision will be awarded:

Household Composition	Amount Payable
Single Adult	£25.00
Couple	£40.00
Addition for each child in household	£15.00*

**Where a household receives free school meals and has been provided with vouchers for food during school holiday periods, they may not be entitled to the child allowance shown.*

Non-Food Items

Household Composition	Amount Payable
Single Adult	£5.00
Couple	£10.00
Addition for each child in the household	£5.00

Utility Items (Fuel and water bills)

Where a household needs assistance with fuel the following amounts to cover a week's provision will be awarded:

- Electricity £15.00
- Dual Fuel £25.00
- The amount provided for assistance with water costs will be determined on a case by case basis

Material Items (Clothing/Items for Warmth)

Household Composition	Amount Payable
Single Adult	£20.00
Couple	£40.00
Addition for each child in household	£10.00

Other wider Household Related Items

Where it is determined that a household needs help towards other household costs/items, the decision maker will determine the best way to fulfil the needs of the applicant.

6. PAYMENT METHODS

Supermarket vouchers will be provided for food and/or other household items which can be bought at a supermarket (such as toiletries, household cleaning, clothes items).

BAC's payments will be provided for any other items.

Where a BAC's payment cannot be made Paypoint payment will be used

7. APPEALS/DISPUTES

If an applicant is not happy with the decision made by the council, they can request a review of the decision stating why they think the decision is not correct. This review can be made immediately after the decision is delivered and must be made within 7 days of the decision.

The application will be reviewed within 7 working days of the request.

Reviews will be carried out by a line manager and, in the absence of a line manager then the team manager will review.

The review decision is final.

8. COMPLAINTS

Dissatisfaction with a decision is not a matter for the complaints procedure and applicants must be advised of their right to a review of the decision in line with the review procedure and how to make a request.

Complaints about administration or review process will be dealt with through the Council's complaints procedure. This includes where the applicant feels the process leading to the decision was flawed or that there was poor communication or a delay. Complaints purely about the decision should be dealt with via a review.

9. OVERPAYMENT AND FRAUD

The council will seek to recover grants found to be overpaid.

The council is committed to identifying and subsequently investigating suspected fraudulent claims made under this scheme. Applicants who falsely declare their circumstances will have committed a criminal offence, which may lead to criminal proceedings being instigated.

10. MONITORING AND REVIEW

The amount spent will be monitored on a weekly basis to ensure the cost of this scheme does not exceed the amount of funding available.

Management Information will be provided to the DWP monthly in accordance with their requirements.