

Covid Winter Grant Policy

Background

The intentions of the scheme are to provide extra support for families with children over winter. The grant is being awarded to Upper Tier Authorities who are encouraged to coordinate with Districts and partner organisations where appropriate.

The key criteria are to ensure 80% is allocated towards families for food and energy and 20% to other vulnerable people or for other urgent support.

Leicestershire County Council has been awarded £1,462,162 of which at least £1,169,729 must be awarded to families with children for food and energy and up £292,432 can support other vulnerable families.

The main restrictions on the grant include:

- Not intended to cover payment of rent or other housing costs
- Not to be used for general advice on managing debt or finances.
- For the purposes of this grant a child is defined as being 19 or under on 31 March 2021
- Data returns are required to ensure that locally authorities are directing the grant to meet the stated policy aims. 50% of the grant will be paid upfront and the remaining 50% in two instalments following satisfactory data returns. Any funds unspent or committed by 31 March 2021 will need to be returned.

This scheme is part of a wider winter support package for families and children, including:

- Up to £220m to fund expansion of the Department for Education's (DfE's) Holiday Activities and Food programme through grants to local authorities and will ensure provision for Easter, summer and Christmas in 2021. Further information for local authorities is to follow shortly from DfE.
- Increasing the value of the Department for Health and Social Care's Healthy Start vouchers from £3.10 to £4.25 from April 2021. Healthy Start supports lower-income pregnant women and families with children under four to buy fruit, vegetables, pulses, milk and infant formula, providing an important nutritional safety net.
- DEFRA will provide further funding for local charities through well-established networks to provide immediate support to front-line food aid charities, including food banks, who are supporting those most vulnerable due to the economic impacts of COVID-19.

The Covid Winter Support Grant has been made available from 18 December 2020 to 31 March 2021.

Every attempt will be made to spread the funding out over the duration of its availability but the Council reserve the right to close the scheme early if all the funding has been allocated. Similarly, this policy is subject to change and amendments may be made to the criteria or value of awards issued in order to best distribute support to as many as possible. Any revisions to the policy will be updated. The Council will not be able to make further awards once the grant has been spent.

Food vouchers for families with pupils eligible for Free School meals

As at December 2020 there are 12,300 pupils registered to receive Free School Meals (FSM) across Leicestershire.

Vouchers will be provided to the parents/carers of all pupils who are eligible for FSM. These

will be distributed through schools and there are restrictions that mean the vouchers cannot be used to purchase controlled products such as alcohol and tobacco.

Vouchers to the value of £15 per child per week, will be issued to eligible pupils in Leicestershire Schools and FE Colleges over the Christmas, February half-term and Easter holidays.

The vouchers for Leicestershire pupils who attend schools in other areas will be provided by the Local Authority in which the establishment is located. Reciprocal arrangements will ensure the provision of vouchers for non-Leicestershire pupils who attend Leicestershire establishments.

Food vouchers for families with pupils eligible for Free School meals in Independent School Provision

Vouchers will be provided to the parents/carers of all pupils who are eligible for FSM. These will be distributed through the schools and there are restrictions that mean the vouchers cannot be used to purchase controlled products such as alcohol and tobacco.

Vouchers to the value of £15 per child per week, will be issued to eligible pupils that Leicestershire funds over the Christmas, February half-term and Easter holidays.

Food vouchers for families with children aged 0-5

Eligible pre-school aged children in Leicestershire County Council attending early years provision at a childminder, pre-school or day nursery may be entitled to the vouchers if they usually attend sessions before and after lunch. Vouchers to the value of £15 per child per week over the Christmas, February half-term and Easter holidays will be issued to children attending early years provision at a childminder, pre-school or day nursery if they reside in Leicestershire and are accessing their 2-year-old Free Early Education (FEEE) or Early Years Pupil Premium (EYPP).

Additional support available via the Winter Support Grant

Leicestershire County Council recognises that all families may potentially be suffering hardship over the winter period and seeks to provide support from the Covid Winter Grant Scheme to any family that meets its criteria. Families that have received FSM vouchers may also require support with fuel or other utility costs. Those who may be eligible might include:

- Families with vulnerable children aged 0-5 or that may not qualify for FSM that are
- known to social workers and Children and Family Wellbeing Service but are not
- accessing FEEE
- Vulnerable families with or without children
- Gypsy and the travelling community

Eligibility Criteria

Applications must meet the following criteria:

1. The applicant must be a resident of Leicestershire over 16 years old
2. A family with or without children who are experiencing financial hardship due to Covid, which means that they are struggling to feed their family, to heat their home, or with other household/utility costs etc
3. Had their and/or their children's identity verified by the professional submitting the application, by using both a form of photo ID (confirming the lead claimant's identity) e.g. driving licence, passport, birth certificate, marriage certificate
4. Had their proof of address verified by the professional (confirming their residence) e.g. benefits letter, bank statement, utility bill, Council Tax bill. If homeless confirmation that they are currently homeless in Leicestershire (from a professional)

5. Eligibility confirmed by the suitable professional making the application

Evidence of financial hardship could include individuals on furlough, on reduced hours, who have been made redundant and have not yet received universal credit, or other loss of household income.

What support is available?

Food vouchers

The following grants are available for food vouchers:

- Households with children: £20 per adult per week, £15 per child per week
- Single households £25 per week
- Multiple adult households £20 per adult per week

These vouchers may also be used for the purchase of toiletries and sanitary products.

Grants will be paid for two weeks, with the consideration of one additional grant payment following the reassessment by a suitable professional and a further application.

No further grants will be paid from the Covid Winter Grant Scheme.

Fuel vouchers

The following grants for fuel costs are available:

Prepayment meter credit – emergency top-up for households with minimal or no credit at risk of self-disconnection due to financial hardship.

Vouchers with the value of £49 (family/multiple adult household) or £28 (single person) issued per application.

2 vouchers issued per household (2 x £49 **or** 2x £28).

Where only 1 voucher has previously been issued, an additional voucher award can be made following the reassessment by a suitable professional and a further application.

A maximum of 2 vouchers in total can be issued per household.

No further grants will be paid from the Covid Winter Grant Scheme.

Energy arrears – financial support if family at risk of underheating due to financial hardship via redeemable cash vouchers to pay off a proportion of energy arrears to reduce cost of repayment plan payments and therefore relieve financial hardship.

Heating fuel purchases – financial support via redeemable cash vouchers for household to purchase delivered fuels (LPG/bottle gas, heating oil, solid fuel) where there is financial hardship and risk of underheating and excess cold.

Residents may be directed to consider setting up pay monthly options where possible for items that otherwise require bulk purchases e.g. heating oil.

One £100 voucher per household can be awarded.

Heaters and heated seats

The aim of the scheme is to provide a temporary heating solution where there is a need (no access to any means of keeping warm) and where no alternative arrangements can be made. The scheme is cross county and run in partnership with district and borough councils

as well as Lightbulb and First Contact Plus. Some district and borough councils have their own stock of emergencies heaters, provided on a loan basis and subject to their own eligibility criteria.

The heaters/heated chair covers are provided to address emergencies, they should not be used to supplement inadequate central heating.

A heater/heated seat cover is free – the recipient will be asked to sign stating that they take possession and responsibility for the heater.

Heaters/heated seat covers are allocated at the discretion of the worker to ensure that the person/family is helped to keep warm and well.

Heaters/heated seat covers are available throughout the winter months from October to April each year.

People must reside in Leicestershire, be a home owner or live in private rented accommodation with no working heating system – those in Social Housing should be referred to their local housing department.

A risk assessment and consideration of the environment/suitability of the chair and associated equipment, the person (their mental capacity and physical condition) must have been undertaken to ensure the appropriateness of the heating solution.

They must present as a low-income household, but no benefits checks are required

Provide signed consent to share their information OR you (the Referrer) record their consent and provide your signature as confirmation, to facilitate onward referral.

The recipient/or their representative must sign the form when the heating solution is delivered and the equipment fitted as per manufacturer's instructions etc.

Workers are asked as part of their discretionary consideration to allocate these resources to those with a high level of need i.e. do not have any other source of heating such as a gas fire, spare room heaters or those can readily source support themselves.

How to apply for grants

A referral from a professional support worker/Local Area coordinator/agency should be made on behalf of applicants; no direct applications will be accepted. A member of the public who does not have anyone to complete a referral should refer to the website for information or contact a professional

Which departments and agencies are able to make a referral?

The Council will accept referrals received from the following trusted partners and departments:

- Children's Services (Leicestershire County Council)
- Education (Leicestershire County Council)
- Adult Social Care (Leicestershire County Council)
- Public Health (Leicestershire County Council)
- Housing districts and social landlords
- Care and NHS professionals including nurses and GPs
- District councils
- Referrals received from other parties will also be welcomed

The Multi Agency Travellers Unit, hosted by the County Council, will be the point of contact for members of the travelling community, eligibility will be the same as outlined above for the food and fuel vouchers.

How will the household receive their award?

Food vouchers will be provided by phone app, e voucher or printed voucher. Fuel payments may be made by voucher for meter top ups, to pay off energy arrears, or payments for directly delivered fuel purchases. Delivery of the award will be dependent on individual circumstances.

General Terms of the Grant Scheme

The referring organisation must verify both a form of photo ID (confirming the lead claimant's identity) and proof of address (confirming their residence).

If it is subsequently identified that a payment under the scheme has been awarded as a result of false or fraudulent information, including the claiming of duplicate awards, the Council reserves the right to withdraw the award and recover the resulting sum due.

The Council will provide a written notice of its decision to the referrer, by email. It is the responsibility of the referring party to inform the referred household of the outcome. The decision notice will set out:

- a summary of the factors considered in reaching the decision
- provide details of how to request a review or obtain more information about the decision
- provide details of how the award (if any) will be made

A lead claimant who is refused an award under the Scheme or is awarded less support than requested may ask the Council to review the decision, provided the request is made in writing to within one month of their referral organisation being notified of the decision.

The review will be conducted by an officer, who was not involved in the original decision, and who is of an appropriate grade.

There is no statutory right appeal against a decision not to award a grant, or against the value or composition of any grant. Complaints regarding the administration of the scheme should be made using the [Council's complaints service](#). The only further recourse for referred households is through judicial review.

The Council will ensure that all applications are validated by proof of identity, and for bank accounts where it is necessary to do so.

If a false statement is provided or false evidence provided in support of the application, an offence may have been committed under the Fraud Act 2006.

Leicestershire County Council has a zero-tolerance approach to fraud and financial irregularity. All suspicions of fraud relating to this scheme will be referred to Leicestershire Police. In addition to any criminal action, the Council will seek to recover all fraud losses.

If you would like a hard copy or large print version please

The online form is accessible in relation to many forms of disability, including compatibility with read-to-user technology. Decision awards and notifications will also follow in this format.

Finance and Monitoring

The Council will operate the scheme under Government guidelines. Grant awards are limited by government grant and cannot be increased.

The Council will undertake monitoring of the number and amount of grant awards in relation to the available relevant budget. The purpose is to ensure the grant awards budget has sufficient funds to meet demand throughout the period of the scheme.

The Council will also monitor cases where a grant referral has been refused to ensure decisions are being made fairly and consistently. The Council is subject to the general equality duty.

This means that steps will be taken to monitor implementation of this policy to ensure no one is subject to disproportionate adverse treatment because they had a protected characteristic. The general equality duty requires that the Council has due regard to the need to:

- Remove or minimise disadvantages suffered by persons who share a relevant protected characteristic that are connected to that characteristic
- Take steps to meet the needs of persons who share relevant protected characteristic that are different from the needs of persons who do not share it

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