

## Family Services

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## **Contents**

- 1. Covid 19 Winter Grant Scheme**
- 2. Principles for the scheme**
- 3. Eligibility Criteria**
  - **Definitions**
  - **Eligibility Criteria**
- 4. Allowable expenditure**
- 5. Procedure for Authorising and Making Payments**
- 6. Welfare Benefits**

# Covid 19 Winter Grant Scheme

## 1. The grant

The government has set aside £170 million for the COVID Winter Grant Scheme which will be issued to County Councils and Unitary Authorities (including Metropolitan Councils and London Boroughs), to support those most in need across England with the cost of food, energy and water bills and other associated costs.

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) will provide funding to County Councils and Unitary Authorities, under section 31 of the Local Government Act 2003, who will administer the scheme and provide direct assistance to vulnerable households and families with children particularly affected by the pandemic. This will include some families who normally have access to Free School Meals during term time. County Councils and Unitary Authorities in England will have the ability to deliver the scheme through vouchers or grants for example. Councils are encouraged to work together with other local authorities to provide support and ensure the funding meets its objectives.

Funding will be dispersed according to the population of each authority, weighted by a function of the English Index of Multiple Deprivation and will be available to support families with children and other vulnerable households and individuals from December 2020 to the end of March 2021.

80% of the grant is ring-fenced to support families with children, and up to 20% of the grant to support other vulnerable households or individuals who meet the criteria set out in this document. At least 80% of the total funding will be ring-fenced to provide support with food, energy and water bills (including sewerage), with up to 20% on other items.

This document has been produced to set out the London Borough of Barnet's eligibility criteria and administration processes for the grant.

## 2. Principles for the scheme

### Objective and key principles set out in the DWP guidance:

- The objective of the COVID Winter Grant Scheme, as set out in the guidance, is to provide support to vulnerable households and families with children particularly affected by the pandemic throughout the winter period where alternative sources of assistance may be unavailable.
- Local authorities have flexibility to develop a local delivery approach that best fits the scheme's objective. When administering this scheme, local authorities are encouraged to adopt the following principles:
  - use discretion on how to identify and support those most in need
  - use the funding from December 2020 up to the end of March 2021 to meet immediate needs and help those who are struggling to afford food and utility bills (heating, cooking, lighting) and water for household purposes (including drinking, washing, cooking, central heating, sewerage and sanitary purposes), or other related essentials.
  - work together with other local services, such as social and care workers to help identify and support households within the scope of the scheme.

- When deciding how to help people, local authorities should consider the following
  - how they plan to provide support to vulnerable households, in other words, paying into bank accounts, use of cash and vouchers
  - any risks associated with these payment methods

### **London Borough of Barnet principles**

- The financial assistance available within the conditions of this grant is to provide temporary relief to families with children and other households or individuals who are adversely financially impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic.
- Financial assistance is determined as 'payment cards, BACS transfers, vouchers, food parcels and payment to third party providers for such goods and services provided to a child, parent or carer or household/individual' under the criteria set out by DWP.
- Before providing financial assistance, the local authority shall have regard to the criteria and conditions of the grant.
- The grant does not replace the local authority's duty to provide support and assistance to children and vulnerable adults through the Children Act 1989, the Care Act 2014 or any other relevant statute.
- This policy sets out the local authority's expectations for processing financial assistance applications; all staff making use of this fund must be aware of and comply with these expectations.
- The management of the budget, compliance and the Local Authority financial regulations, within which this guidance operates, rests with the budget holder and under the scrutiny of the Service Director.

## **3. Eligibility Criteria**

### **Definitions**

- The definition of a child for the purposes of the scheme is:
  - under the age of 19 as at 31 March 2021; or
  - a person aged 19 or over in respect of whom a child-related benefit (for example, Child Benefit) is paid or free school meals are provided; or
  - Where an eligible child is living on his or her own, they should be treated as a 'household'
- Where an eligible child lives on his or her own, they are a household that includes a child, covered in the 80% allocation for households with children. Vulnerable households which include a person aged 19 to 25 with special educational needs and disability (SEND) and/or care leavers in accordance with the Children and Families Act 2014 may still be eligible for grant support however that support falls within the 20% allocation to households without children.

### **Eligibility criteria**

- Children that are in receipt of benefits-related Free School Meals where their household income has been negatively impacted by Covid 19, such as through furlough or reduced employment.
- Children who access Free Two year old Education Entitlement where their household income has been negatively impacted by Covid 19, such as through furlough or reduced employment.
- Children who are home educated with parents where their household income has been negatively impacted by Covid 19, such as through furlough or reduced employment.

- Any child identified by an agency (school, nursery, health professional) as being in genuine need to promote their physical and emotional well-being as related to the grant such as warm clothes, footwear, blankets.
- Families with No Recourse to Public Funds, where children are also in receipt of either benefits-related Free School Meals or access Free Two year old Education Entitlement.
- Any adult identified by Adult Social Care and their partners as being in genuine need to promote their physical and emotional health as related to the grant such as warm clothes, footwear, blankets.
- The recipient meets the criteria for funding available within the grant conditions under both elements set out within allowable expenditure below.
- Those who are in receipt of other financial assistance such as other grants, foodbank or crisis loans can be supported by this fund where their household income has been negatively impacted by Covid 19, such as through furlough or reduced employment.
- And in all of the above cases, that the individual is a resident in Barnet (whether they go to a Barnet school is not relevant).

## 4. Allowable expenditure

The funding has two aspects:

- at least 80% of the total funding is ring-fenced to provide support with food, energy and water bills for household purposes (including drinking, washing, cooking, central heating, and sanitary purposes) and sewerage, or other essentials. Within this condition there is flexibility about the proportion of support allocated to food and to bills.
- up to 20% of the total funding can be used to provide support with other essentials clearly linked to the scheme conditions (including sanitary products, warm clothing, soap, blankets; boiler service/repair; purchase of equipment including fridges, freezers, ovens, etc.), in recognition that a range of costs may arise which directly affect a household's ability to afford or access food, energy and water.

The funding cannot be being used as an alternative to the support that would ordinarily be provided under the provisions of Universal Credit, any other state benefit, s17 Children Act 1989 or other statutory duty.

The funding cannot be used to pay off existing loans and can only be used for debt relating to energy or water costs

## 5. Procedure for Authorising and Making Payments

There are two ways the grant will be distributed:

- Financial assistance distributed by authorised organisations (schools, colleges, early years providers and health visitors) to children and families. This can be provided in vouchers, payment card, BACS transfer or food parcels. This can be provided in one off or multiple payments depending upon assessed need
- Funding provided to organisations to provide meals and holiday activities for children where eligibility criteria are met

The procedure for authorizing and making payments is:

- Approvals will be within the financial scheme of delegation

- Young Barnet Foundation supported by Public Health will manage online applications for organisations to be authorised to distribute financial assistance to children and families.
- Agreed applications will be sent to finance for recording of management of information and for payments to be authorised.
- Payments via vouchers or pre-paid cards will be issued by the finance team to Young Barnet Foundation to distribute to approved organisations.
- Any BACs payments will be made by the finance team.
- Reporting of management information to DWP will take place in February and April as set out in the grant requirements

To ensure fraud risk is minimised, the intention is to use a voucher system rather than cash. Children and families eligible for the scheme will be identified through schools, health visitors, early years settings and Children’s centres. This means that children’s/families identities will have been checked when registering with a GP (for health Visiting Services), or will be on the school role, or for those in receipt of FEE2 will be from families who meet the government eligibility criteria and so there will have been a benefit check at the point of application. If there is any evidence of fraud it will be reported to CAFT for investigation and if a person is found to have obtained money fraudulently, they can be prosecuted and the money will be recouped.

## 6. Advice on welfare benefits

Due to Covid 19 families may have been furloughed or lost their employment. As this grant is to provide temporary relief to families with children and other households or individuals who are adversely financially impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic, it is important to provide help for such families to access appropriate benefits and return to work so that they can achieve financial sustainability in the longer term.

The Department of Works and Pensions produces a guide to benefits which is available and includes, benefits for children with disabilities, pregnant women, carers and young people and the current rates of benefit and tax credits. Referrers should ensure **that** families have **the** information booklet regarding Welfare/Benefit advice and refer/signpost to welfare advisors or CAB for debt management as appropriate.

The Welfare Benefits Team, Early Help (WBT) can also provide guidance on the range of benefits available to children and families and also provide initial advice on matters related to debt (such as use of bailiffs, administration orders, bankruptcy etc).

Troubled Families Employment Advisors are available for families with children as part of the Troubled Families Programme to support access to returning to training and employment and provide links into Job Centre Plus Advisors for adults/households with no children

Contact points for support from the Job Centre Plus Employment Advisors and Welfare Rights Officer are:

<p><b>Job Centre Plus Employment Advisors</b></p>	<p>Sharon Sargusingh Margaret Olojo</p>
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<b>Welfare Rights Officers</b>	Ayeshia Feisal Amina Baadhio Laureace Richards Fatime Ruhani
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