

Cost-of-Living Support Scheme: Discretionary Support



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Supplementary Information

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1. Purpose of this document

This guidance is to provide Welsh principal local authorities with relevant information to enable them to design and deliver a Discretionary Cost-of Living Support Scheme (DCOLSS) on behalf of the Welsh Government. The package was announced as part of the Welsh Government's Supplementary Budget on 15 February 2022.

2. Overview of the Discretionary Cost-of Living Support Scheme

The Welsh Government announced a package of measures to help people with the cost-of-living crisis. The package includes £152m to provide a £150 cost-of-living payment to eligible households (the main scheme) and £25m to provide discretionary support for other purposes related to living costs.

The schemes are intended to provide immediate support as Wales recovers from the pandemic and support households to deal with the impact of increasing energy and other costs.

In developing local Discretionary Scheme, local authorities have complete autonomy to target the funds to best support residents and to ensure their approach best suits the need of their individual residents.

3. Items for consideration in a Discretionary Cost of Living Support Scheme

Each local authority may use the funding provided under the Discretionary Scheme to provide support to households it considers to be in need of assistance with their living costs. This support may take the form of a payment to a household not already covered in the main scheme, or it may cover the cost of essential services provided to the household, for example extending the provision of free school meals or meals-on-wheels.

Each local authority will determine how it utilises the available funds and some areas for consideration in the local discretionary scheme are listed below.

Items that should be considered in a Discretionary Scheme:

- Households in receipt of the following council tax exemptions.
 - Care Leavers – Class X
 - Severe Mental Impairment – Class U
 - Providing & receiving care – Class I & J

Items that could be considered in a Discretionary Scheme:

The discretionary nature of this scheme permits authorities to consider other categories that could be eligible for support, namely.

- Payments may be made to separately identifiable households living in Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs).
- Payments may be made to dwellings wholly occupied by students (not halls of residence).
- Social sector properties banded E+.
- Households with restricted entitlement under the Benefit Cap or 2-child limit.
- Households who are receiving housing support services and/or are living in temporary accommodation or a refuge.
- Properties with Disability Band reductions (E-I)
- Properties where a Domiciliary care plan in place due to additional costs incurred
- Households in receipt of Free School Meals but not captured in the main scheme

Wider use of Discretionary Funding:

We recognise local authorities, and their partners are closest to their residents and therefore best able to target support most effectively. It's noted that the rising cost of living cannot be dealt with quickly and consideration could be given to utilising resources in the following areas.

- Enhancing capacity within existing support functions to maximise income and provide effective advice
- Linking with energy efficiency schemes for properties with high EPC ratings
- Supporting Community Pantry and Food Club initiatives for access by wider community
- Supporting transport/fuel initiatives in rural communities

The authority has discretion over the value of the award and to pay by instalments if it considers making a full payment would not be in a household's best interests or that it might compromise their welfare.

It is recognised that payments or the provision of other support to such households may be more readily administered by specialist services within the local authority – e.g., social services, homelessness services, educational support services etc.

4. Process

As part of their Discretionary Scheme, Local Authorities will determine how the scheme is promoted and how to access ensuring those it is intended to reach are aware of it.

Accessibility requirements

Authorities will need to ensure any forms and local awareness-raising materials are accessible. They will also need to provide information in Welsh and English and support customers who have difficulty using online facilities

In accordance with the main scheme – any Discretionary Scheme will be required to be completed by 5.00pm on 30 September 2022.

5. Funding

Funding

As outlined above, a total of £25m of funding has been identified for the Discretionary Scheme. Each local authority has been notified of their individual allocation and will be responsible for ensuring any such scheme is deliverable within the terms of their allocation.

6. Records to be kept by Welsh Authorities

Authorities will be required to report spending under their Discretionary Scheme on the existing Cost of Living Support Scheme monitoring form which must be returned weekly to CouncilTaxPolicy@gov.wales.

