

LCC COVID Local Support Grant Scheme 2021

1. What is the COVID Local Support Grant Scheme (CLSGS)?

1.1 This is a national scheme administered by the Council to support Leicester residents most in need with the cost of food, energy (including heating, cooking, lighting) and water bills (including sewerage), toiletries, replacement cookers, microwaves, washing machines, fridge freezers, school uniforms and clothing for children in a nursery setting (the Scheme). The Scheme is part of a wider support package for families and children including the Holiday Activities & Food Programme (HAF Programme), and was extended from 21st June 2021 with additional government funding to 30th September 2021.

1.2 The Scheme will operate between 17th April 2021 and 30th September 2021, subject to budgetary restrictions outlined below in section 3. Referrals will be accepted in respect of the extension period from 12th July 2021 to 17th September 2021.

1.3 This document sets out the local eligibility framework and the Council's approach in administering the Scheme (the Policy). The Policy is subject to change and should any amendments or additions be required, the updated Policy will be republished. Any referrals received the day following any published amendments will be assessed in accordance with that updated Policy.

2. Why is the Scheme being extended?

2.1 The aim of the Scheme is to give vulnerable households peace of mind during the pandemic by helping those who need it to have food on the table and other essentials, and to ensure that every child will be warm, well-fed and clothed.

3. What are the main features of the extended Scheme?

3.1 Grant awards will be made from a limited budget allocation from Central Government of **£1,319,280.25**, plus any unspent funding from the previous grant

period, and will include the cost of administering the Scheme. The Council will not be able to make further awards once the Government grant and any additional funds the Council may allocate from time to time have been spent.

3.2 Alongside the HAF Programme, the Council will through its delivery partner, Reaching People use CLSGS funding to deliver the following extended provision:

- fund the lunch packs for up to 15% of the children who present at HAF programme locations and other locations where holiday activities are organised, do not meet HAF programme eligibility criteria and are identified as vulnerable;
- fund the administrative costs for Reaching People for the delivery of this separate food offer.

3.3 CLSGS funding will also support HAF Programme with food awards in respect of vulnerable households unable to attend the HAF Programme, in the following categories:

- households with children in receipt of short break grants from The Disabled Children's Service's Team at the Council;
- households with children in receipt of FSM and meet Education, Health & Care Plan (EHCP) needs in special schools;
- households with Special Educational Needs (SEND) children educated in the independent sector (outside of Leicester City) in receipt of FSM.

3.4. Awards using the Government grant allocation are based on the following framework¹:

- at least 80% of the total funding will be ring-fenced to support households with children, with up to 20% of the total funding to other households experiencing, or at risk of experiencing, poverty during the pandemic. This may include households not currently in receipt of DWP welfare benefits;

¹ Full government guidance is published at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-local-support-grant-extension-21-june-to-30-september-2021-guidance-for-local-councils>

- at least 80% of the total funding will be 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. 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 scheme is not intended to cover payment of rent or other housing costs because these are not directly related to food or utility bills and other benefits and support is available to cover these costs. Nor is it intended to be used for the provision of general advice on managing debt and/or financial hardship.

3.5 The Policy aims to operate the Scheme under guidance published by the DWP in order to make grant awards for all residents in respect of whom a valid referral is made during the operation of the Scheme and the full eligibility criteria outlined in section 4.1 below is satisfied.

3.6 Subject to eligibility, successful claimants will receive a grant award, the nature of which is at the discretion of the Council. Consideration will be given to the referral request and available information regarding the household's circumstances. Where a claimant is successful, only one award of grant (per household) will be made covering the extension period. Repeat referrals and claims will not be accepted.

3.7 For the extension of this Scheme referrals will be accepted from the 12th July 2021 until the 17th September 2021. Grant awards will take the form of vouchers, credit, food provision or item delivery in respect of one or more of the following, the form of

which will be at the discretion of the Council taking into account the claimant's circumstances and the resources at the Council's disposal:

- Food,
- Utilities bills, either current or historic where a debt is due (gas, electricity),
- Water/sewerage,
- Toiletries (including sanitary products),
- Replacement cookers and microwaves,
- Washing machines (where a medical need can be evidenced),
- Fridge freezers,
- School uniforms,
- Clothing for children in a nursery setting.

3.8 Eligibility is assessed as per household, taking into account household composition. A household is defined as the lead claimant, their partner, spouse or civil partner if they have one, and any dependent children. Where energy costs are required, the lead claimant should wherever possible be the individual named on the bill. A dependent child must be aged under 16, or aged 16-19 years old and they are not married, nor in a Civil Partnership, nor living with a partner; and living with parents; and in full-time non-advanced education or on a Government training scheme.

3.9 All grant awards must be distributed by no later than 17th September 2021, and e-voucher awards will expire if unused by the 30th September 2021.

4. Am I eligible for support?

4.1 In order to be eligible for a grant award, a lead claimant in respect of a referral household must meet the following criteria:

- be resident within Leicester; and
- be aged sixteen years or more; and
- be considered financially vulnerable; and

- be adversely financially impacted by Covid through redundancy, furlough or reduced working hours; or
- be required to self-isolate, in financial hardship and have been refused a Test & Trace Support Payment; or
- as a safeguarding measure where a serious risk to the health and safety of at least one member of the household has been identified².

4.2 In order to be eligible for a grant award, a referral household must not consist only of persons without recourse to public funds³, unless there is a genuine care need that does not arise solely from destitution leading to a statutory duty for the Council, for example if:

- there are community care needs, and/or;
- they have serious health problems, and/or;
- there is a risk to a child's wellbeing.

Households that meet the criteria are known to the Council's Persons from Abroad Team.

5. Which departments and agencies are able to make a referral on my behalf?

5.1 With the exclusion of lunches provided to supervised playgrounds for those not accessing Holiday Activity Food (HAF) and those accessing community food banks, access is predominantly made through referrals by professionals or VCS partners.

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

- Children's Services;
- Education;
- Adult Social Care;
- Housing;
- Revenues & Customer Support;

² See definition in Appendix, section 4

³ As defined by s.115 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1995.

- Citizens Advice Leicestershire

5.2 Referrals received from other parties will also be welcomed subject to a signatory from the organisation completing a declaration agreeing a minimum service standard.

Please contact C19residentgrant@leicester.gov.uk for further details.

6. What do I need to provide with my referral?

6.1 We will, for all applications under the scheme, ask referral partners to provide the following mandatory information, without which the referral may be refused:

- Confirmation that identity has been verified at source⁴, or that sufficient information has been provided for identity to be traced by the Council⁵ and that the referrer is satisfied on the basis of the evidence provided to them that the criteria for eligibility is satisfied;
- The reason for the referral, i.e. which of the eligibility criteria in section 3 are met;
- Name;
- Address and postcode;
- Mobile number and email address, unless assessed as digitally excluded – our preferred and fastest award method is digital;
- Household composition.

6.2 The referral partner must also provide the following information wherever possible:

- Landline number;
- Gender;
- Ethnicity;
- Disability status.

6.3 Referral partners must declare on a relevant household's behalf that they meet all relevant eligibility criteria.

⁴ In order to meet this obligation, we ask that your organisation has verified both a form of photo ID (confirming the lead claimant's identity) and proof of address (confirming their residence)

⁵ As governed by the mandatory sections of the referral form outlined below.

7. How do I apply on behalf of a household?

7.1 Applications to the Scheme should be made using the online form.

8. How will the household receive their award?

8.1 Grant awards will be made in the following ways:

- Food (and toiletries/sanitary products) – by phone app, e-voucher or included in food box;
- Gas, by e-voucher or referral to directly credit accounts;
- Electricity, by e-voucher or referral to directly credit accounts;
- District Heating, by directly crediting rent accounts;
- Water/sewerage – by providing credit or referral to directly credit accounts;
- Replacement cookers, fridge freezers, washing machines and microwaves – by delivery;
- Clothing – by voucher

8.2 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 also reserves the right to report suspected fraud to the Police.

9. How will I be notified of the decision?

9.1 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.

10. What can I do if I want the decision to be reviewed?

10.1 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 C19residentGrant@leicester.gov.uk within one month of their referral organisation being notified of the decision.

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

10.3 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/service provided of the scheme should be made using the Council's complaints service at complaints@leicester.gov.uk. The only further recourse for referred households is through judicial review.

11. How does the Council prevent fraudulent claims for the Scheme?

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

11.2 If you falsely declare your circumstances, provide a false statement or provide false evidence in support of your application, you may have committed an offence under the Fraud Act 2006.

11.3 Any actual, potential or perceived conflict of interest must be declared by the referring party. Failure to do so will result in the termination of referrals from the referring organisation and a referral to the Police.

11.4 Leicester City 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.

12. Are the application form and this document accessible in other formats?

12.1 If you would like a hard copy or large print version please contact Leicester City Council on 0116 454 1006 or via email at SDIO@leicester.gov.uk or by post at the following free post address: Freepost RTRE-HTRJ-CSSJ, Service Improvement Team, Leicester City Council, Revenues & Benefits Department, York House, 91 Granby Street, LEICESTER, LE1 6FB.

12.2 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.

Appendix: Background and Legislative Framework

1. Finance and Monitoring

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

1.2 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.

1.4 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.

1.5 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
- Foster good relations.

2. Legislative framework & equality monitoring arrangements

2.1 The Council may use any evidence and information supplied to it in respect of the Scheme to check the eligibility of the applicant in respect of this scheme or any other welfare benefit, discounts or exemptions in compliance with its powers and obligations under Data Protection Act 2018 and other legislation. Our data sharing and fair processing detail can be found at the following web link: <http://www.leicester.gov.uk/your-council-services/council-and-democracy/key-documents/internet-disclaimer/>

3. Definition of vulnerability to determine eligibility

3.1 Referral partners are advised to target households who are vulnerable, having no or limited financial resilience and more likely to be affected by the Coronavirus pandemic would be likely to present with:

- Struggling to pay the bills, particularly this year 21/22
- Typically a working or working benefit household
- Typically low income
- Just about managing financially (also known as cliff edge households).

3.2 Relevant employment should be considered to include:

- Self-employed
- New job
- Zero contract/agency
- Apprenticeship

- Factories, leisure industry, beauty industry, gyms, hospitality, event management

3.3. The following characteristics are considered to be strong indications of vulnerability:

- Leaving care child up to the age of 25
- SEND child, particularly those with a care plan under EHCP
- Ex-Armed Forces
- Lone parent
- BAME
- Traveller communities

4. Definition of safeguarding needs (risk to health and safety)

This crisis will be the cause of a severe risk to the health and safety of the applicant or an immediate family member/dependant(s). Examples of when your health and safety might be at severe risk include:

- no access to essential needs (food, and heating);
- imminent deterioration/deterioration in health;
- domestic or sexual abuse;
- neglect and harm;
- breakdown of the family unit;
- exceptionally poor living conditions;
- onset of, or deterioration in the health of an immediate family member;
- risk of homelessness deemed to be unintentional;
- safeguarding including corporate parenting responsibilities (adult or child)