



West Berkshire Council COVID Winter Grant Scheme Background 27 November 2020

On Sunday 8 November 2020, the government announced a significant package of extra targeted financial support for those in need over the winter period through the £170 million DWP COVID Winter Grant Scheme.

A press release has been issued to make people aware that West Berkshire Council is launching a local COVID Winter Grant Scheme to deliver funding worth £279k for food, energy and other essential items for residents in need due to the pandemic. The COVID Winter Grant Scheme will run from 1 December 2020 to 31 March 2021.

Through the COVID Winter Grant scheme, the Council will provide families, individuals and vulnerable people in need with financial support for food, utility bills (heating, cooking, lighting), water bills for household purposes (including drinking, washing, cooking, central heating, sewerage and sanitary purposes), or other related essentials.

As part of the scheme, the Council will make arrangements for the provision of Free School Meal vouchers for eligible 5 to 16 year olds during the Christmas and February half term school holidays (17 days in total). Children in school not currently receiving Free School Meals but considered by the school as vulnerable will be included. Consideration will also be given to children between 16 and 18 and children in cross border education settings. Details on how the vouchers will be implemented are currently being finalised.

The West Berkshire Council COVID Winter Grant Scheme will reflect the grant conditions for how the funding should be spent as shown below. The scheme will be administered by the Council and will be launched on Tuesday 1st December.

- At least 80% of the total funding will be ring-fenced to support families with children, with up to 20% of the total funding to other types of households, including individuals.
- 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.

The COVID Winter Grant Scheme funds of £279k were recently allocated to West Berkshire by central government. Further funding of £150k has been identified from

the Council's overall allocation of Covid-related grants to support the local delivery framework should it be required.

The application process for the COVID Winter Grant Scheme will also enable eligible applicants to benefit from other funding through the £103k Emergency Assistance Grant for Food and Essential Supplies for ongoing support with their needs, for example, information to access longer term support such as benefits. This will provide a total of £532k funding available to support people in COVID related hardship in West Berkshire over the winter period.

To identify those most in need for the COVID Winter Grant Scheme, the Council will work closely with professionals, statutory partners, Parish Councils, Citizens Advice West Berkshire, Newbury Resource Centre and other community and voluntary groups. DWP Job Centre Plus will also be playing an active role to support those newly in financial hardship, such as through a recent job loss.

Those who currently have support from professionals such as social and care workers will be encouraged to work with their provider to make an application. In addition, individuals who are in need can make an application independently on the West Berkshire website or contact the Community Support Hub from 1 December, when the scheme formally launches.

Applicants will be asked for information about the financial support required and for information about any benefits that are being paid. The application will not be means tested. Non-receipt of benefits will not necessarily exclude a family or individual from receiving support, and any exceptions will be dealt with on a case by case basis.

The application form will be made available 1 December online at <https://info.westberks.gov.uk/coronavirus-support>.

Any individuals who may need support with the online application process, including those without internet access, are welcome to contact the Community Support Hub from 1 December on tel: 01635 503579 or by email: westberksbct@westberks.gov.uk. The Community Support Hub is open during office hours between 8.30am and 5pm Monday to Thursday, or between 8.30am and 4.30pm on Friday.

Full details of the grant conditions for both the DWP COVID Winter Grant Scheme and the DEFRA Emergency Assistance Grant can be found on the relevant government department websites.

