



# COVID Winter Grant Scheme Policy

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## **Introduction**

Funding has been made available to Local Authorities to support those most in need with the cost of food, energy (heating, cooking, lighting), water bills (including sewerage) and other essentials.

The scheme is part of a wider winter support package for families and children, including the significant expansion of the Department for Education's (DFE's) Holiday Activities and Food Programme, which will ensure provision for Easter, Summer and Christmas in 2021.

The scheme will operate between 1 December 2020 and 31 March 2021.

Wigan has been allocated £1,124,537.72.

## **Scheme aims**

The aim of the Scheme is to give vulnerable households peace of mind in the run up to Christmas and over the winter months during the pandemic by helping those who need it to have food on the table and other essentials, so every child will be warm and well-fed this winter.

## **Funding allocation**

Grant awards will be made from a limited budget allocation from central Government of £1,124,537.72, which will include the cost of administering the scheme.

## **Grant Allocation Framework**

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 Department for Work and Pensions welfare benefits.

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, 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 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.

## **Wigan's main scheme**

### **Families in receipt of Free School Meals**

The Council is offering support to all families currently in receipt of Free School Meals.

Wigan has 2 scheduled school holidays to March 2021:

- two weeks at Christmas
- one Week at February half-term

With help towards:

- food
- gas and or electricity bills
- water bills

Families in receipt of free school meals are being contacted directly with the offer of support and invited to complete a short online form providing the bank account details for payment of the grant to be made directly into their account.

### **Wider offer of support**

As well as supporting the families in receipt of Free School Meals Wigan's scheme will also offer support to other vulnerable households during the winter months, this will include:

- families not in receipt of Free School Meals
- households without children
- individuals
- care leavers

The above list is not exhaustive.

Types of support available:

- gas and electricity vouchers for households with pre-paid meters and support towards bills for households without pre-paid meters
- help with water bills
- food vouchers
- help towards buying warm blanket and bedding
- white goods to allow families households to store and prepare meals safely

### **Eligibility**

Requests for support will be directed through our current local welfare support offer and criteria to establish households and individuals' circumstances considering hardship or the risk of experiencing poverty during the pandemic.

Households may be receiving other forms of support and this will be taken into account to avoid duplicating provision where possible.

However, families receiving other forms of assistance are not excluded from receiving support through this grant. For example, a household may:

- have additional wider needs in terms of food
- need support with provision for cooking, lighting, heating and/or water (including sewerage)
- require other essential supplies

To apply for support applicants will need to be:

- resident of Wigan Borough
- be aged sixteen years or more
- be adversely financially impacted by COVID and find themselves in hardship

Applicants with no recourse to public funds can apply regardless of their immigration status, if there is a genuine care need that does not arise solely from destitution for example if:

- there are community care needs
- they have serious health problems
- there is a risk to a child's wellbeing

## Applications for support

Applicants can apply more than once and multiple awards can be made to the same household if need is identified.

## Households requesting support

Households and individuals are able to apply for support themselves by visiting [www.wigan.gov.uk/localwelfaresupport](http://www.wigan.gov.uk/localwelfaresupport) and completing the online application form or by phone 01942 705221 Monday to Friday 9:00 am. to 5:00 pm.

## Professional and 3<sup>rd</sup> Party Referrals

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

- Children's Services
- Adult Social Care
- Education
- Housing
- Collections and Assessment Team
- Care and NHS professional including nurses and GPs

The above list is not exhaustive and referrals from other parties will also be welcomed.

Professional and 3<sup>rd</sup> Party referrals can be made by emailing [welfaresupport@wigan.gov.uk](mailto:welfaresupport@wigan.gov.uk) and will need to include the following information:

- Confirm that identity has been verified at source, or that sufficient information has been provided for identity to be traced by the Council
- The reason for the referral
- Name
- Address including postcode
- Mobile number and email address, unless assessed as digitally excluded
- Household composition

## Awards

Grant awards will be made in the following ways:

- food – by supermarket voucher
- gas – by voucher for households with a pre-paid meter or payment directly into bank accounts if no pre-paid meter.

- electricity – by voucher for households with a pre-paid meter or payment directly into bank accounts if no pre-paid meter.
- water and sewerage – by providing payment directly into bank accounts.
- other essential items, such as clothes and bedding – by providing supermarket e-vouchers by email or to mobile phone

## **Fraud**

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.

## **How will I be notified of the decision?**

The Council will provide a written notice of its decision to the referrer, by email. 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.

## **What can I do if I want the decision to be reviewed?**

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 [Wintergrantscheme@wigan.gov.uk](mailto:Wintergrantscheme@wigan.gov.uk) within one month of 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 procedure](#). The only further recourse is through judicial review.

## **How does the Council prevent fraudulent claims for the Scheme?**

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 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.

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

## **Are the application form and this document accessible in other formats?**

If you have difficulty accessing the form online you can contact us on 01942 705221 or via email at [wintergrantscheme@wigan.gov.uk](mailto:wintergrantscheme@wigan.gov.uk).

## 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.

## Legislative framework and equality monitoring arrangements

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. See our [data sharing and fair processing details](#).

## Useful information for referring agencies

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 20/21
- probably a working household
- working benefit household
- low income, but not necessarily
- just about managing financially also known as cliff edge household

Relevant employment should be considered to include:

- self-employed
- new job
- zero contract or agency
- apprenticeship

In the following settings:

- factories
- leisure industry
- beauty industry
- gyms
- hospitality
- event management

The following characteristics are strong indications of vulnerability:

- leaving care child
- SEND child
- ex-Armed Forces
- lone parent
- BAME
- traveller communities