

## Area Board Briefing Note – Cost of Living Update – March/April 2023

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For a summary of the resources and recent announcements, take a look at the Council's [dedicated Cost of Living page](#). This includes links to information for sources of national and local support.

The [interactive community directory](#) which helps people to search for warm spaces and community food providers in their area, also lists the easiest bus routes to help people find help more easily.

### **New Government schemes to support people that haven't received energy payments**

Wiltshire Council is supporting the local administration of national Government schemes that aim to help people who haven't yet received any automatic financial assistance from any energy support schemes.

Most households get a £400 discount on their energy bills. However, in some cases, people do not get the discount automatically; for example, if they pay for energy through a landlord, housing manager or site owner, or live in a park home, houseboat or off the electricity grid. The Government's Energy Bills Support Scheme (EBSS AF) Alternative Funding is now in place to help these people.

The EBSS AF is providing support of £400 for energy bills for households in England, Scotland, and Wales without a direct relationship to a domestic electricity supplier.

The scheme is now open to all eligible households until 31 May 2023.

Subject to applications meeting the [eligibility criteria](#), people who will be able to receive support under EBSS AF include:

- care home residents and others in care facilities
- park home residents, [those living in](#) houseboats and [in](#) caravans that can provide proof of address
- social and private tenants who pay for energy through a landlord on a commercial supply
- homes on a heat network/private wire
- off-grid homes
- farmhouses used for wholly domestic purposes

Anyone eligible for EBSS AF will need to fill out a short online form via the [GOV.UK website](#). The form can be found by searching "Apply for energy bill support if you do not get it automatically" into the search bar on GOV.UK or an internet search engine. Applications are made directly to the Government, not to or via Wiltshire Council. For those who do not have

online access, they can apply via a contact centre on 08081 753287 where a representative will guide them through the application process.

Once they have applied, the application will be processed and verified. After this, if the application is successful, details will be shared with Wiltshire Council, who will deliver the one-off, non-repayable support.

The payment will be made directly into the bank account in a single payment. Further information can be found on [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk).

The Government has also announced a 'sister' scheme called Alternative Fuels Payment (AFP) for people that use alternative fuels for heating, which starts from 6 March. People may be eligible for a [£200 Alternative Fuels Payment \(AFP\)](#) if both the following are true:

- their household is not connected to the mains gas grid
- they use alternative fuels as their main form of heating

This one-off payment would be on top of the £400 from their electricity supplier.

People are eligible for this payment if the main way they heat their home uses:

- tank or bottled gas
- liquid petroleum gas (LPG)
- oil
- wood
- solid fuel

Most homes that are eligible for this payment will get it automatically as a credit on their electricity bills, but they may not get the payment automatically if their home is either:

- in an area which is mainly connected to the gas grid
- not connected to either the gas or the electricity grid

If people do not receive this payment automatically, they have to apply for this payment through the same method as the AFP Alternative Fund, for example, because they do not have a contract with an electricity supplier. Wiltshire Council will help process the payments made through the Government's portal, which is the same one used for EBSS AF.

### **Additional Fuel Support**

Wiltshire Council colleagues in Adult Social Care and Public health are also working together to identify funding from other sources to provide some support to boaters who may not qualify under the scheme. Work is also underway to identify and to provide support to those who use lifesaving equipment at home.

## **Holiday Activity and Food programme for Children this Spring**

The council will be delivering the Holiday Activity and Food programme, known locally as FUEL during the Easter, Summer and Christmas school holidays in 2023. The FUEL programme is funded by the Department of Education and will deliver FUEL camps in ten areas across the county where there is the greatest level of need.

At FUEL camps children receive a nutritious lunch each day and are given the opportunity to take part in a range of practical, physical and hands on activities including robotics workshops, circus skills, sporting sessions, Olympic kit, talent shows, and arts and crafts workshops.

Two FUEL Easter camps for young people with special educational needs and/or a disability are also taking place at Springfield Community Campus in Corsham and at Five Rivers Health and Wellbeing Centre in Salisbury, where individuals will be able to take part in a range of activities such as dance, new age kurling, cricket, boccia and nutritional workshops.

In addition to a nutritious meal, children can enjoy fun healthy eating and food workshops, which are delivered in partnership with Learn By Design, Occasional Kitchen and Purely Nutrition in Wiltshire.

FUEL Easter camps will take place over four days, from Monday 3 April until Thursday 6 April 2023, between 10am to 2pm.

The ten camps will take place in Amesbury, Calne, Chippenham, Devizes, Melksham, Royal Wootton Bassett, Salisbury, Trowbridge, Marlborough and Westbury.

Applications for the Easter FUEL camps are now open and will close on 22 March 2023. Places are limited and only families with children eligible for benefit related free school meals should apply.

Programme details and information on how to apply for a place will be promoted through all schools in Wiltshire and on [FUEL programme](#).

For more information about the Holiday Activity and Food Programme in Wiltshire, families can email [fuelprogramme@wiltshire.gov.uk](mailto:fuelprogramme@wiltshire.gov.uk)

## **Healthy Start: free vitamins and financial help available for buying healthy food and milk. Support available for families through the Healthy Start scheme:**

The [Healthy Start](#) scheme can help those eligible to buy healthy foods and receive free vitamins to give children the best start in life.

Healthy Start is for children under the age of four and pregnant women/people only, who could get:

- £4.25 each week of their pregnancy (from the 10th week of your pregnancy)
- £8.50 each week for children under 1
- £4.25 each week for children between the age of 1 and below 4 years old

To check eligibility and to apply for Healthy Start see <https://www.healthystart.nhs.uk/how-to-apply/>. Also see attached document: ('Healthy start- Applying Criteria -online-phone-email.doc')

[Application](#) is either on-line or via email / telephone depending on an individual's circumstances. Local [Childrens' Centres](#) can support with the application process and Wiltshire libraries can support with getting on-line.

[Healthy Start](#) has changed to a [digital scheme](#) that now offers a prepaid card to those applying for Healthy Start instead of paper vouchers. The Healthy Start card is topped up every 4 weeks with your payment.

Free vitamins available

See further [information for Health professionals](#) and resources to download, print and share via the [NHS Healthy Start scheme resource library](#), including posters, stickers, social media assets. See attached poster ('Get help to buy food and mill -A4" and "You could help – A4"')) as examples for use.

Follow / reshare Healthy Start on social media: [NHS Healthy Start - Home | Facebook](#) [NHS Healthy Start Scheme \(@NHSHealthyStart\) / Twitter](#)

Those who use Healthy Start card in Sainsbury's will get a £2 top-up voucher: [Got a Healthy Start card and shop at Sainsbury's? You can get a £2 a week top-up coupon - here's how \(moneysavingexpert.com\)](#)

## **Tax-free childcare for working families -**

For every £8 you pay into an online account, the government will add an extra £2, **up to £2,000** per child per year.

15 hours per week funded childcare for two year old children - need to meet eligibility criteria:

- income-based Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA)
- income-related Employment and Support Allowance (ESA)
- Universal Credit, and your household income is £15,400 a year or less after tax, not including benefit payments
- the guaranteed element of Pension Credit
- Child Tax Credit, Working Tax Credit (or both), and your household income is £16,190 a year or less before tax
- the Working Tax Credit 4-week run on (the payment you get when you stop qualifying for Working Tax Credit) or your child is:
  - are looked after by a local authority
  - have an education, health and care (EHC) plan
  - get [Disability Living Allowance](#)

- have left care under an adoption order, special guardianship order or a child arrangements order

All three and four year olds are eligible for 15 hours funded childcare per week - working families can claim 30 hours per week, full information on the [Childcare Choices website](#)

## **Bus fare reductions over winter**

Following an extension, Wiltshire bus users can now travel on most routes in the county for just £2 or less for a single fare until 30 June.

The fare price reduction has been funded by the Government and is aimed at getting more people to use buses across the country during the current cost of living challenges.

As part of the promotion, many single bus fares in Wiltshire have been capped at just £2 for both adults and concessions. If the single fare was originally less than £2, it will remain at the reduced price, and many day return tickets have also been reduced. Further information about it's application and impact in Wiltshire can be read [here](#).

## **Energy Advice and Support**

- Following funding received from the Government's Green Homes Grant, the Council has been improving the energy efficiency of 100 properties.
- Officers created the Interactive Community Directory which helps people to search for warm spaces and community food providers in their area, also lists the easiest bus routes to help. There are also currently 124 warm spaces and 41 food providers registered on our Community Directory, our own libraries amongst them as welcoming spaces where people can get support.
- As well places to access energy advice, Libraries are also collection points for Warm Packs. So far more than 1,000 packs have been provided; each contains a hot water bottle, blanket and thermal mug. The packs will continue to be available for anyone who needs one until the end of March, or while stocks last. Library staff have also been supporting customers asking for energy advice and have made more than 80 referrals to Warm and Safe Wiltshire and the Rural Communities Energy Support Network. This advice service will continue with the council's partners for the next two years.
- The Warm and Safe advice service has provided energy, debt, bill advice, small grants, insulation advice and referrals. Since the beginning of October, the service has received 1009 enquires, made 144 heating and insulation referrals, 87 Priority Service Register sign ups and provided £26,000 in food and fuel vouchers and distributed £30,328 of Surviving Winter Grant to Wiltshire households

- During the 3-week cold period in December Public Health officers, using £30,000 from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, worked with Julian House outreach to help 71 Boaters and 4 Roadside Travellers with both fuel and food vouchers. Households were identified by Julian House based on eligibility criteria: low income, health condition, single parent and children with health condition.
- The Wiltshire Installs project has supported 209 households since the beginning of October 2022, through a mixture of prepayment meter and food vouchers, in addition 11 new boilers have been fitted where households have had a no heating situation.
- Warm and Safe Wiltshire has worked in partnership with both Integrated Care Board and Adult commissioning to identify households that rely on life saving equipment, who are disproportionately affected by the high energy prices. Through November families have been offered support through the provision of food and prepayment meter vouchers, to date **13 families** have been supported.
- The Government has published [Energy Bills Support Scheme \(EBSS\) Alternative Funding](#) available for those households that have not got a direct relationship with their energy supplier e.g. some care home residents, park home residents and some housing association tenants. It is important to note that caravan or boaters will need to provide proof of residence to be eligible.
- Applicants will have to apply via the [Government portal](#) which is now live. Submitted applications will then be checked by the Council to ensure the application is from a valid residential address before processing payment.
- A government telephone helpline is also available for people without access to the internet to apply for the payment.

## Targeted Support

- The Council has been administering the Government's national Household Support Grant Scheme (HSF) designed to support those most in need across England, to help with the significantly rising living costs in the period up to the end of March 2023. The money can be used to support households in the most need who would otherwise struggle with energy, food and water bills, particularly those who may not be eligible for the other support that the Government has recently made available but who are nevertheless in need.
- The council was awarded £2,728,656 in total and has worked with partner agencies to allocate the money and ensure it gets to those who need it most. Payments began in October and are continuing to be made. People do not need to apply to Wiltshire Council as those eligible will be identified and contacted.

## Allocations of funding included:

- **Families eligible for FSM or Early Years equivalent:** £100 per child for the winter period including Easter, payment via schools usually in the form of vouchers
  - **Low income families with school-age children not eligible for FSM:** £50 per child with identification and payment method at discretion of schools
  - **All families with children:** Children's Social Care grants where appropriate
  - **Low income households without children** (including those with disability): £100 per household
  - **Elderly:** grants of up to £300 via Surviving Winter, hot meals provision, Adult Social Care grants where appropriate
  - **Homeless, rough sleepers and at risk of homelessness:** grants via Housing Services usually in the form of vouchers
  - **All residents:** Warm Spaces provision, Food Banks, Local Welfare Support
- We await confirmation of grant conditions and funding level for the next round of Household Support Fund; indications are that allocations are likely to be made for 12 month period 1<sup>st</sup> April '23 to 31<sup>st</sup> March '24.
  - The Council was also awarded £877,050 for a discretionary energy rebate scheme that ran until November. The number of applications to the scheme was lower than anticipated, just under 1200 awards were made originally, so officers proactively identified a further 9500+ low-income pensioners who had received the original energy rebate scheme but had not received any additional support e.g. from the HSF. 6500 of these pensioners will be paid £70 direct, as we have their bank account details, and the remaining will receive a credit in their council tax accounts.
  - Our Tenancy sustainment team has been supporting tenants through the ongoing cost-of-living crisis by assisting them to get access to more than £600,000 worth of new and backdated benefits, external grants and third-party debt cleared.
  - Funding is also being provided to Age UK Wiltshire for provision and delivery of hot meals to isolated elderly residents who are unable to meet the cost of this service themselves

## Area Boards

Each of the 18 Area Boards have been hosting local conversations regarding the cost of living and working with their communities to develop local projects and initiatives that support residents. A few of the projects are as follows:

- Multiple Area Boards have hosted warm and safe community events, bringing together a range of partners to showcase what support they can offer to residents
- Coordinated the production, printing and distribution of local cost of living information leaflets to specifically targeted residential areas through Officers, volunteers and Councillors.
- Worked with community groups to draw in multiple sources of funding to develop small emergency hardship funds that agencies can refer suitable residents to.

- In partnership with food banks and community organisations, provided a range of useful products free of charge to suitable residents including slow cookers and electric blankets.

## **Free sims and mobile data from Wiltshire libraries**

Wiltshire Libraries are working with the Good Things Foundation to distribute free SIMs and mobile data to people in need. The [National Databank scheme](#) is supported by UK mobile networks including Vodafone, O2 and Three.

The free SIMs and mobile data are available from Chippenham, Devizes, Salisbury, Trowbridge and Warminster libraries.

To be able to access the National Databank you must be 18+ years old and from a low-income household. One or more of the following must also be true:

- You have no or poor access to the internet at home.
- You have no or poor access to the internet away from home.
- You can't afford your existing monthly contract or top-up.

If you meet the criteria, [contact](#) Chippenham, Devizes, Salisbury, Trowbridge or Warminster libraries to find out more and to book an appointment.