
Date: 27 November 2020

West Berkshire Council to launch £279k COVID Winter Grant Scheme for residents

West Berkshire Council is launching a COVID Winter Grant Scheme worth £279k for food, energy and other essential items for residents in need due to the pandemic. Free School Meal vouchers for holidays will also form part of the programme. 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.

[Councillor Lynne Doherty](#), Leader of West Berkshire Council, said: “We are fully aware that it’s going to be a tough winter for the large number of residents whose jobs sadly have been impacted by the pandemic. We want them to know that our new COVID Winter Grant Scheme is available to help pay for food, utility bills, and essential supplies between December and March next year.

“As we head into winter and the festive season, we do not want anyone to be concerned about being able to feed their families or keeping warm.”

The COVID Winter Grant Scheme funds of £279k were recently allocated to West Berkshire by central government. Further funding 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 such as 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.

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 online application independently on the West Berkshire website or contact the Community Support Hub from 1 December, when the scheme formally launches.

The application form will ask for information about the financial support required and for information about any benefits they 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.

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 8.30 am and 5.00 pm Monday to Thursday, or between 8.30 am and 4.30 pm on Friday.

Arrangements will be in place to identify and manage any incidences of fraudulent activity.