

Household Support Fund - Exceptional Hardship Scheme - April 2025

Frequently Asked Questions

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What is the scheme?

The Household Support Fund Exceptional Hardship (HSFEH) scheme provides eligible households in exceptional hardship with a discretionary payment.

Applications to this fund will open in stages. Application windows are anticipated to open in April, July, October and January. Exact dates of these application windows will be published on the Household Support Fund webpage.

Application windows may close early if demand is exceptionally high, to ensure that funding is available across all application windows. The scheme will close no later than 16 March, but this is a limited pot of funding, so it will close earlier if all funds have been distributed. Updates on the scheme will be published at - www.portsmouth.gov.uk/householdsupportfund

Who is eligible?

To be eligible for the HSF Exceptional Hardship scheme, a household must meet all the following criteria:

1. Resident in Portsmouth City Council's area (postcodes PO1 - PO6, PO7 5AT, PO7 5AU, PO7 5AX, PO7 5AY, PO7 5AZ, PO7 5BA, PO7 5BS, PO7 5BT or PO7 5BU);
2. Have recourse to public funds¹, or be a vulnerable household receiving support from Portsmouth Social Care services or Portsmouth City of Sanctuary;

¹ <https://www.nrpfnetwork.org.uk/information-and-resources/rights-and-entitlements/immigration-status-and-entitlements/who-has-recourse-to-public-funds>

3. Be over 18 (or 16-17 years old, not in full time education, and working or receiving means-tested benefits, and living independently);
4. Be in exceptional hardship - unable to afford essential daily living costs or an essential household item due to an unmanageable reduction in income or increase in costs;
5. Have household earnings below the income threshold for your household composition - see table below;
6. Have not received an HSF Exceptional Hardship award within the last six calendar months;
;
7. Have submitted a complete application and provided all requested supporting evidence of circumstances before the scheme closes.

Household income thresholds - Total household income, excluding disability benefits		
Number of children in the household	Single adult	Couple
No children	£30,821	£38,912
1 child	£40,022	£46,694
2 children	£49,222	£54,476
3 children	£58,422	£62,259
4 or more children	£67,623	£70,042

To be eligible, you must not have access to any funds, including savings, that could be relied on to meet the need you are applying for, and there must be evidence that financial support is essential for you to keep warm and well-fed and maintain a reasonable standard of living.

You must have already accessed money advice, or be willing to receive advice and support, in order to:

1. Ensure you are receiving all the income they are entitled to;
2. Identify ways to reduce your expenditure;
3. Receive specialist debt advice for any unmanageable debt.

You must have maximised your income by completing a benefits check² and applying for any other relevant assistance such as discretionary housing payments.

How do I apply?

Applications must be made using the online form - [Household Support Fund - apply for the Exceptional Hardship Scheme](#)

The form can also be found by going to Portsmouth City Council's website at www.portsmouth.gov.uk/householdsupportfund.

² <https://www.portsmouth.gov.uk/services/benefits-and-support/cost-of-living-hub/are-you-getting-the-right-benefits/>

If you are unable to complete an online application and upload copies of evidence documents, you can get support by calling our Household Support Fund Helpline on 023 9268 8010. If you apply by phone, you will need to bring your evidence documents to the Civic Offices to be scanned or send via email to hsfhardship@portsmouthcc.gov.uk.

If you are receiving support from a professional agency in Portsmouth, such as Social Care or Housing, they may be able to assist you with your application. Contact your support worker to find out if they can help you apply to this scheme.

What evidence do I need to provide?

You will be asked to provide evidence of your circumstances. Please supply clear scanned images, screenshots or photos of the relevant documents.

Proof of identity (for you and any partner living with you)	<p>Any of the following, clearly showing your name, address and the date of the letter:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Bank or building society statement• Credit card statement• Household utility bill• Landline phone bill• Valid EU or UK driving licence
Statements for all Bank, Building Society and all other current accounts, savings and investments for you and any partner living with you	<p>You must provide statements for the last two months (we need to see all pages for each statement you give us) for of all your bank, building society and post office accounts, certificates for premium bonds, National Savings certificates, ISAs, stocks and shares, and unit trusts.</p> <p>This includes overdrawn accounts, and any other account where you or your partner are a named party.</p> <p>These statements must be provided in full and clearly show your name, address and bank account details.</p>
Any other relevant supporting evidence to confirm why you are in need	<p>Any documents that support information provided in the application. If you are asking for help with energy costs, you must provide a recent energy bill. Other relevant evidence could include bills or other expenses, or proof of circumstances such as information about health or your family's needs.</p>

If an application is submitted without all the evidence required, you will be contacted via email to request the evidence is provided. You will be given 14 days to respond, or your application will be closed. If you need longer to respond, please reply to the email to let us know the reasons and when you will provide the evidence required.

How do I find out if my application has been successful?

You will be contacted by email within 28 days of making your application and providing your evidence documents to tell you the outcome of your application, which will be either:

1. Eligible, including details of how you will receive the payment
2. Ineligible
3. Application incomplete - further information and/ or evidence required

There is no right to appeal a decision, but you can ask for the decision to be reviewed if you believe it has not been based on correct information.

To request a review of a decision, you must reply to the email advising you of the decision on your application, or email hsfhardship@portsmouthcc.gov.uk within 14 days of receiving the decision on your application.

How is the payment made?

Eligible recipients will receive a payment into their bank account, or a voucher code for a supermarket or furniture / electricals store, issued via email using the details entered in your application, within 10 days of the decision being made.

Supermarket voucher codes can be redeemed for vouchers from one or more of the following stores:

Aldi	Asda	Sainsbury's
Company Shop	Farmfoods	Waitrose
Iceland	M&S Food	Tesco
B&M	Morrisons	

Furniture / electricals voucher codes can be redeemed for vouchers from one or more of the following stores:

Argos	B&M	B&Q
The Charity Shop	Currys PC World	Homesense
Ikea	Next	Screwfix
The White Company	Wickes	

We are unable to make payments into certain types of Building Society accounts that have a roll number. In this case, or if there is another reason why someone cannot receive a BACS payment, the payment will be made by cheque, in the name of the applicant, posted to their address.

How are the payment amounts decided?

Decisions of whether to make an award, and how much to award, are made on a case-by-case basis. Awards are discretionary and there is no guarantee that an award will be made in any circumstance.

Awards can be made to meet one or more of the following needs:

- Groceries / shopping
- Energy costs
- White goods - cooker, fridge / freezer, washing machine, tumble dryer
- Furniture or furnishings - bed, sofa / chair, table and chairs, curtains / blinds, rugs
- Wider Essentials - repairs to an essential vehicle, buying a bicycle, paying for fuel to get to work, children's clothing
- Other essential purchase

Award amounts will be based on the size of the household, the circumstances of the household and reasons for the need, as well as the available funds remaining, and decisions will be made on a case-by-case basis. Awards are discretionary and there is no guarantee that an application will be successful.

Awards will not exceed the maximum award amount for the household size:

1 person	2 people	3 people	4 people	5 people	6 or more people
£350	£420	£500	£600	£700	£800

For households in the highest level of need, an additional severe vulnerability amount of up to £200 can be added to the maximum total award for their household size.

Can I appeal the decision?

There is no right to request an appeal of a decision whether to award a Household Support Fund Exceptional Hardship payment.

However, if you disagree with a decision on your application (such as whether to make an Exceptional Hardship payment, or the value of an award), you can ask for a review of the decision, by providing full details of your reasons for requesting a review. A review can be requested in writing to hsfhardship@portsmouthcc.gov.uk or by calling 023 9268 8010.

A review will be undertaken by a manager who was not involved in the original decision, and will consider the information from the original application, as well as any additional relevant information provided in your request for a review.

The review decision is final.

What other help is provided with the cost of living?

The details provided in your application will be used to provide advice and information to assist you with cost of living pressures and other relevant issues.

For advice and support to help with the cost of living, visit the council's online information hub at www.portsmouth.gov.uk/costofliving. You can also speak to someone for advice by ringing the cost of living helpline on 023 9284 1047.

If you would like money advice, including advice on benefits, budgeting, bills, or dealing with debt, you can contact:

- Advice Portsmouth - for anyone who lives or works in Portsmouth:
<https://adviceportsmouth.org.uk/>
- Your local area housing office - for Portsmouth City Council tenants:
<https://www.portsmouth.gov.uk/services/council-and-democracy/contact-us/#housing>
- Your customer service team - for housing association tenants.

If you need specialist debt advice, you can contact:

- Citizens Advice Portsmouth:
Call 02394 006 600
Visit Ark Royal House, Winston Churchill Avenue, Portsmouth, PO1 2GF - open Monday to Thursday between 10am-3pm, Friday 10am-4pm
- Your local area housing office - for Portsmouth City Council tenants:
<https://www.portsmouth.gov.uk/services/council-and-democracy/contact-us/#housing>