

Dear Colleagues

### **Latest Support schemes for residents January 2023**

I would like to draw your attention to the following schemes which have been set up to support our residents during the current cost of living crisis:

#### **Household Support Fund #3 – 01 Oct 2022 – 31 Mar 2023**

Kent County Council (KCC) have been awarded a total sum of £11,065,380 and have notified and confirmed an allocation of £181,122.93 to ABC from their Household Support Fund (HSF) allocation.

The expectation is that HSF will be used to support households in the most need, particularly those who may not be eligible for the other government support recently made available, including the Cost of Living Payments set out on 26 May 2022.

The scheme comprises of two parts. The first is to support anyone in the borough, including those above the benefit line through a referral to the Peoples Pantry in Repton. We will also provide financial support to Housing Benefit recipients. As this is a means tested benefit this cohort have not received the £650 cost of living payment.

Letters have sent to all 800 applicable residents to advise they will automatically receive their £200 by 10 Feb 2023 (if we already have their payment details). If not they need to complete a short online form to provide their bank details to enable us to pay them by the same date. Help and support is provided by the Welfare Intervention Officers or Customer Services for anyone that needs help completing the online form.

Any remaining funds will go to the Peoples Pantry, with the opportunity, if funding is available, to apply a small amount to the Discretionary Housing Payment pot.

More information on the scheme can be found on our website:

<https://www.ashford.gov.uk/benefits/claiming-benefits/household-support-fund-1-october-2022-31-march-2023/>

#### **Council Tax Support Fund - 1 Apr 2023 – 31 March 2024**

The Council has been allocated £227,310 to pay every resident in receipt of Council Tax Reduction, up to £25 towards their 2023/24 Council Tax bill. This is an automatic payment and residents will not need to apply for it.

This will use up approximately £172,000 from Ashford's allocation and the remainder of the fund will be used to automatically allocate up to £25 to any resident new to receiving Council Tax Reduction throughout the year.

This is expected to use up the remainder of the fund. If any funds remain at 31 March 2024, these will be put into the Exceptional Circumstances Payment scheme which is also the approach being taken by the other Kent local authorities.

More details on this scheme can be found on the Government's website:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/council-tax-support-fund-guidance/council-tax-support-fund-guidance>

### **Cost of Living Payments 2023 to 2024 (administered by DWP & HMRC)**

The new £900 cash boost for over eight million eligible means-tested benefits claimants, including those on Universal Credit, Pension Credit and tax credits, starts in spring and will be paid direct to bank accounts in three instalments over the course of the financial year.

There will also be a separate £150 for over six million disabled people and £300 for over eight million pensioners on top of their Winter Fuel Payments. Exact payment windows will be announced, but are spread across a longer period to ensure a consistent support offering throughout the year. They will be broadly as follows:

- £301 – First Cost of Living Payment – during Spring 2023
- £150 – Disability Payment – during Summer 2023
- £300 – Second Cost of Living Payment – during Autumn 2023
- £300 – Pensioner Payment – during Winter 2023/4
- £299 – Third Cost of Living Payment – during Spring 2024

More details can be found on the Government's website:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/millions-of-low-income-households-to-get-new-cost-of-living-payments-from-spring-2023>

### **Energy Bill Support Scheme Alternative Funding**

The Government has also announced details for how people in England, Scotland and Wales without a direct relationship to a domestic energy supplier, including many care home residents and those living in park homes, will receive a £400 discount on their fuel bills through the Energy Bills Support Scheme Alternative Funding (EBSS).

Those households who will need to apply, for example because they do not have a relationship with an electricity supplier, will be able to do so in February, through the same GOV.UK portal as the one that will be used to apply for support under the EBSS Alternative Funding scheme. They cannot apply to Ashford Borough Council.

Online applications will open for households who are eligible for the £400 EBSS Alternative Funding to submit their details, alongside a helpline for those without online access. Payments to households that meet the eligibility criteria – including people who get their energy through a commercial contract or who are off-grid – will be made by local authorities in Great Britain. This is likely to include:

- care home residents
- residents of park homes
- tenants in certain private and social rented homes
- homes supplied via private wires
- residents of caravans and houseboats on registered sites
- farmers living in domestic farmhouses
- off-grid households

At the time of writing BEIS have paused this scheme as the pilot identified some issues therefore we await further information, however details on this scheme can be found on the Government's website: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/vital-help-with-energy-bills-on-the-way-for-millions-more-homes-across-great-britain-and-northern-ireland>

The Government is also providing a further £200 Alternative Fuel Payment (AFP) to help those households in Great Britain who use alternative fuels such as biomass or heating oil to meet energy costs this winter. Most households eligible for the AFP support in Great Britain, will receive payment automatically via their electricity supplier in February, with no need to take any action.

I hope this summary of central Government funding is helpful.

The council is doing its best to promote the support and advice that is available to our residents through events, information at the One You shop in Park Mall, and a dedicated section (<https://www.ashford.gov.uk/cost-of-living-help/>). We also regularly share information across all our other channels, including our residents' magazine, Ashford For You and on social media.

Gerry Clarkson CBE, QFSM, BA (Hons)

**Executive Leader - Ashford Borough Council**

**Distribution:** All Members of the Parish or Town Council, and representatives of the Community Forums