

Cheshire West and Chester Council

Cost of Living Support



30 October 2024



Scan the QR code using your mobile phone to receive the latest Cost of Living Support e-newsletter. Get practical information and advice on how to save money, straight to your inbox.



Government's Household Support Fund extended to 31 March 2025

Following the government's announcement to extend the Household Support Fund for the period 1 October 2024 to 31 March 2025, the Council has consulted with local organisations about how best to help people in Cheshire West and Chester.

The Council's plan, which has now been approved, sets out how the money will be spent, as detailed below.

- Pensioners on a low income who are claiming Housing Benefit or Council Tax Reduction but are not receiving Pension Credit and therefore no longer qualify for the Winter Fuel Payment support, will receive £200.
- Families with children who get free school meals will receive food vouchers worth £17.50 per week for each of the four weeks of school holidays.
- Payments of £50 will be made to Carers who provide 35 hours care per week and whose details are held within our Housing Benefit or Council Tax Reduction records.
- Payments of £100 will be made to Care Leavers under the age of 25 and still resident in our area.
- Financial support will be available to residents via local charitable organisations.
- Low income households can apply for help with energy and food costs.

Whilst the Council's plan has been approved, the application processes are still being developed and therefore are currently unavailable. Our website will be updated once applications are available.

<http://www.cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk/household-support-fund>

Pension Credit

If you're of pension age on a low income of less than £218.15 per week for a single person, or £332.95 as a couple, you may be eligible to claim additional support

through Pension Credit. This will provide you with an additional weekly income as well as access to additional benefits such as a free tv licence, help with NHS costs, cold weather payments and the Winter Fuel Payment worth up to £300.

If you feel you may qualify, please make further enquiries regarding this valuable support you could receive. The Pension Service have a helpline
T: 0800 99 1234 and can provide further advice to you.

Warm Home Discount scheme

Applications to the Warm Home Discount scheme for permanent residents living in a park home who pay for their electricity directly to the park site owner, is now open. Funding is limited and applications will be considered on a first come, first served basis.

For more information, visit:

<https://charisgrants.com/partners/park-homes/>

Additional advice and support

If you're currently struggling, please visit the Council's website where there is lots of information and support available to help you.

<http://www.cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk/cost-of-living>



Are you eligible for Council Tax reduction.

It's important to know that you can apply if you are working, or unemployed.

You can apply for council tax support if you:

- live at the property
- pay council tax
- have a low income, or are entitled to a benefit paid by the Department for Work and Pensions or the Pension Service
- have capital of less than £6000, if you are working age; or £16,000 for working age protected group applicants and pension age.
- if you are of Pension Credit age.

Further details on the maximum amount we can pay or how we calculate what you're entitled to, can be found on the council tax reduction web page in the 'Related information' section on the page.

<https://www.cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk/counciltaxreduction>



Home energy efficiency schemes available for eligible residents

As we head towards the cooler autumn months, take the time to see if you are eligible to apply for one of our energy efficiency schemes.

Improving the energy efficiency of your home not only helps to reduce energy bills but also has the added benefit of helping to improve your health and wellbeing. There are a number of schemes available, including the Home Upgrade Grant and The Energy Company Obligation (ECO) Scheme.

Home Upgrade Grant

This scheme is available to eligible residents living in a property that is not heated by mains gas and has an Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) rating of Band D, E, F or G.

If you qualify for a Home Upgrade Grant then improvements that can be made to your home include, wall and loft insulation, heating upgrades, solar panels for electricity generation and much more.

The Energy Company Obligation (ECO) Scheme

This is a national Government scheme aimed at improving the energy efficiency of eligible homes to help reduce fuel poverty levels and lower carbon emissions.

If you live in a property with an EPC rating of Band D, E, F or G and you meet certain eligibility criteria you may be able to benefit from a range of energy efficiency upgrades.

To find out more about these and other schemes or to apply, visit:

www.cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk/homeenergyhelp



Access Council services easily using simple voice commands

A new, Alexa skill has been developed by the Council meaning that residents can get quick and easy access to information and updates about services, using simple voice commands.

This additional Alexa feature provides real-time information, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, by responding to a series of questions or commands - such as:

- When is my next bin collection?
- What can I put in my recycling bin?
- Where's my nearest library?
- When does the current school term start?
- I want to report a missed garden bin collection,
- and much more.

Councillor Nathan Pardoe, Cabinet Member for Inclusive Economy, Regeneration and Digital Transformation, said:

“Residents and businesses have to be able to access the information they need at the time that they need it, it’s why the Council is committed to developing new ways for people to access information about the things the Council does.

“The Alexa skill can be installed free of charge, and is accessible to anybody with an Alexa device or the free Alexa app. It’s easy to set up, inclusive for people with mobility or visual impairments and it also demonstrates the Council’s commitment to innovation and good customer service. As well as the new Alexa skill, the Council will continue to offer the more familiar ways to ask questions - including online telephone and in-person.”

The Council’s Alexa skill can be accessed from any mobile device, directly from Amazon. Search Cheshire West and Chester in The Alexa Skills department on Amazon.

Alternatively, via the Alexa app from any smart device, by searching Cheshire West and Chester in the skills and games option and clicking the Launch button. The skill will ask for a location and name permissions to enable it to provide an all-round experience.

A full list of phrases that Alexa will respond to can be found on the Council’s website.

<https://www.cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk/residents/contact-us/alexa>



Helping people prepare for later life

The Council has launched a campaign to help people across the borough prepare for later life and access any support they might need.

There is an ageing population in west Cheshire, with a 24 per cent increase in people aged 65 and above according to the latest

Census data, meaning more people are needing to access Adult Social Care services provided by the Council and organisations it commissions.

Depending on individual circumstances and finances, people might need to pay for all or some of the care they receive in the community.

The Council has created an easy to use, online financial assessment calculator, which will tell you how much you might be asked to contribute towards any care depending on your financial circumstances.

Visit: [cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk/carecostcalculator](https://www.cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk/carecostcalculator).

For more information about the support available from the Council and a range of other partners, visit:

[cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk/managingyourmoney](https://www.cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk/managingyourmoney).

Finance officers from the Council will also be attending the regular Let’s Talk sessions across west Cheshire, providing an opportunity for you to have an informal chat with them about care services and the help available to pay for them.

More information about Let’s Talk sessions is available on the Council’s website.

Visit: [cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk](https://www.cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk) and search Let’s Talk



Council launches budget simulator as part of its conversation with the public on spending

People living in Cheshire West and Chester are being urged to have a go at balancing the Council's budget, by using an online budget simulator tool.

The simulator is part of the Council's annual budget consultation, Join the Budget Conversation, which includes spending and budget proposals reflecting local people's priorities and aligns with its recent Borough Plan.

The consultation gives an overview of the increasing need for Council services.

Cabinet Member for Legal and Finance, Councillor Carol Gahan, said:

"Local public services are under significant and immediate financial pressure. There are no easy solutions. Looking after children and adults who need to use care services and ensuring all children have the best start in life, is an investment in the borough's future, as well as a moral and legal duty, and takes up around two thirds of the Council's expenditure budget. Not only do we want to undertake these duties, but moreover, we are legally required to do so. Many more children with complex needs are requiring high-cost placements. There are currently 13 placements each costing over £500,000 a year, which accounts for 34% of the overall spend supporting children in care.

"The Council spends £977 million each year on services which benefit local people every day. For example, we undertake refuse, recycling, food and garden waste collection. We clean and maintain roads and public open spaces. We are proud that our museums, libraries, leisure centres and swimming pools have thrived during these difficult times, which has sadly, not been the case for many other local authority areas. The bulk of our budget funds services that many people may not be aware of, if they, their family or friends are not directly impacted. These are vital to many people in our communities who need extra help and support. Please have a go at balancing the budget for yourself and take part in the survey. Local people's feedback on our approach and latest thinking is very important."

There are several ways you can get involved and have your say.

- Visit our Join the Budget Consultation page to complete a survey and have a go at balancing the budget by taking part in the budget simulator.
<https://participatenow.cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk/hub-page/join-the-budget-conversation>
- You can write to: Join the Budget Conversation, Insight and Intelligence, Cheshire West and Chester Council, The Portal, Wellington Road, Ellesmere Port, CH65 0BA

Email: councilbudget@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk to share your views

Telephone 0300 123 8123, to speak to the Council's Contact Centre, quoting 'Join the Budget Conversation'.

- Paper copies of the consultation will be available in all public libraries and on request using the contact details above. Alternative formats are also available on request using the contact details above.

This consultation will close on **Sunday, 1 December**.

The results will be published on the Council's website

in January 2025, so that people who took part can see how their views have influenced decisions.

Specific budget proposals will be voted on at a full Council meeting, scheduled for 20 February 2025.

Community stories



New Community Café at Road Two, Winsford

The new community café, which is more than just a café, opened to the public earlier this year. As well as being a fabulous place to meet new people and enjoy a coffee or a bite to eat, it also showcases a range of beautiful furniture that is available to buy through the ReUse Warehouse next door.

Located on Road Two, Winsford Industrial Estate, the café is open Monday to Saturday from 10am to 3pm.

You don't have to be from the local area to enjoy what's on offer. So, why not pop along for some great value food and drink and find out what other services are available.

The café and additional services have been made possible by Changing Lives Together, a charity whose mission is to find innovative solutions for environmental and social challenges that benefit local communities.



Free impartial advice to help you take control of your bills, save energy at home and access additional support.

Green Doctors work with public and private partners to ensure support reaches those who need it most in local communities.

Support is available to a wide range of people so if you're finding it hard to heat your home, worried about how you're going to manage your energy or water bill, have a health condition affected by the cold then we might be able to help.

Our support includes:

- the installation of small energy saving measures such as draughtproofing and radiator foils
- help with boiler and heating controls
- smart meters / water meters
- fuel and water debt
- registration on suppliers' Priority Services Register
- grants
- behavioural change advice
- referrals for free gas safety checks

- financial assistance where available.

The scheme is open to residents across Cheshire West and Chester with a focus on families and individuals who:

- have a low household income
- are living with debt
- are aged over 65
- are living with a health condition affected by the cold
- are living with mental illness
- are living with dementia
- have a disability
- are young people and families containing children under the age of 5
- are pregnant
- are in emergency accommodation
- are living in poor housing conditions.

As we head towards winter it's important to reach out for help if you need it. For more information, visit: www.groundwork.org.uk/greendoctor

Email: greendoctor.CLM@groundwork.org.uk or

Phone: 0330 1740 863