

DWP administered Household Support Fund in England and guidance that the fund should be used to support those in most need; particularly those who may not be eligible for the cost of living payments but who are still in need, including those in receipt of Housing Benefit only. Can I therefore enquire:

- (i) If DWP shared its Household Support Fund 3 guidance for the period 1 October 2022 - 31 March 2023 with DfC; and
- (ii) Did DfC update its guidance for those determining entitlement to Discretionary Support to identify and support those who had missed out on cost of living payments, particularly those in receipt of housing benefit only?

Discretionary Support Centre
20 Castle Street
Antrim
BT41 4JE
Phone:

Our ref: DFC/2023-0058
Your ref:

Dear

10 May 2023

Freedom of Information Act 2000

The Department has now completed its search for the information you requested on 12 April 2023.

You specifically requested:

- (i) If DWP shared its Household Support Fund 3 guidance for the period 1 October 2022 - 31 March 2023 with DfC.**

In June 2022, the DWP provided DfC with information on the Cost of Living Support, which included details of the increase in funding to be provided by the UK Government for the Household Support Fund.

The information provided by DWP also highlighted that additional guidance would be made available to Local Authorities to ensure support available through the Household Support Fund was targeted towards those most in need of support, including those not eligible for the Cost of Living Payments. DfC subsequently obtained the DWP guidance on the Household Support Fund.

- (ii) Did DfC update its guidance for those determining entitlement to Discretionary Support to identify and support those who had missed out on cost of living payments, particularly those in receipt of housing benefit only?**

All decisions on the award of Discretionary Support are made after considering the individual circumstances of the claimant and, if appropriate, their immediate family. This includes the award of financial support to assist with short-term living expenses. As such, an individual who satisfies the Discretionary Support eligibility criteria will be considered for an award regardless of whether they were eligible for a Cost of Living Support payment.

It was therefore not considered necessary to issue new / updated guidance to deal specifically with the issue of entitlement to Discretionary Support for people who had not received a Cost of Living Support payment. However, updated guidance was issued to DfC staff to advise that any Cost of Living Support payment received by a claimant should be disregarded when assessing entitlement to an award of Discretionary Support.

As entitlement to Discretionary Support is determined with regard to the annual income of a claimant it is anticipated that most people in receipt of Housing Benefit would have income at a level that would satisfy the Annual Income Threshold element of the Discretionary Support eligibility criteria.

Any change to the Discretionary Support eligibility criteria, or to the number of awards that can be made, would necessitate a change to the Discretionary Support Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2016. This includes making specific provision for people claiming Housing Benefit or for anyone ineligible for a Cost of Living Support payment who would not otherwise be eligible for Discretionary Support. Such changes can only be introduced with the approval of the Northern Ireland Assembly.

If you are dissatisfied with this response and wish to request a review of our decision or make a complaint about how your request has been handled, you may ask for an internal review within two calendar months of the date of this letter. You should write to the Information Access Manager, Department for Communities, Level 5, Nine Lanyon Place, BELFAST, BT1 3LP, or send an email to foi@communities-ni.gov.uk.

If you are not content with the outcome of the internal review, you have the right to apply directly to the Information Commissioner for a review of our original decision.

The Information Commissioner can be contacted at:

Information Commissioner's Office
Wycliffe House
Water Lane
Wilmslow
Cheshire
SK9 5AF

If you have any queries about this letter, please contact me. Please remember to quote the reference number above in any future communications.

Yours sincerely

Finance Support Manager