

Supporting people to pay their bills

- **Winter Fuel Support Payment** – a £200 cash payment for people and families on low incomes to help them pay their energy bills.

We have invested an additional £90m in the **Winter Fuel Support Scheme** in 2022-23 to extend the scheme to more than 400,000 low-income households in winter 2022-23. Households receiving child tax credits, pension credits, disability benefits, carers allowance, contributory benefits and those receiving a council tax reduction will now be eligible for the £200 payment. The scheme started on 26 September

- A **£150 cost-of-living payment** has been provided to all households in properties in council tax bands A to D and to all households, which receive support from the Council Tax Reduction Scheme in all council tax bands.
 - This goes further than the UK Government's announcement of a £150 payment for households in council tax bands A to D in England.
 - As of 22 August, more than 90% of eligible households had received the £150 payment.
 - A further **£25m** was provided as a discretionary fund for local councils, to help households which may be struggling.
- Our £244m **Council Tax Reduction Scheme** helps more than 270,000 households in Wales with their council tax bills. Around 220,000 households pay nothing at all.
- The Welsh Government is consulting on wide-ranging proposals to **make council tax fairer**. The aim is to rebalance the tax burden on households and make council tax less of a worry for people with tighter household budgets while ensuring the tax continues to fund services that benefit everyone.

Proposals include completing a revaluation of the 1.5m properties in Wales to ensure valuations are up-to-date and people are paying the appropriate amount. Different bands would be created with new tax rates for each band, to create a fairer tax. The last revaluation in Wales was in 2003

- **£4m** to provide **fuel vouchers** and a **Heat Fund** to support people on prepayment meters and not on mains-gas who are facing hardship.

Working with the **Fuel Bank Foundation**, a national voucher scheme will provide direct support to some 120,000 eligible households on prepayment meters – they will be able to receive vouchers of £30 in the summer and £49 in winter. Households can have three vouchers over a six-month period.

The Heat Fund will provide direct support to eligible households living off the gas grid, which are reliant on heating oil and liquid gas. This will help an estimated 2,000 households across Wales.

- **Warm hubs** – The First Minister has confirmed initial funding of **£1m** to support organisations, including local authorities and community councils, to provide warm hubs/centres this winter (2022-3). These are places where people can go in their local community to stay warm during the day so they do not have to heat their own home. Food and activities will also be available.
- The draft Budget includes £30m capital funding – a 10% increase – for lower income households in 2022/23. The consultation on the next **energy efficiency measures** iteration of the Warm Homes Programme was published on 22 December.
- **Tackling food poverty** – We have allocated **£3m** to support the development of cross-sector food partnerships and strengthen existing food partnerships. These will help build resilience in local food networks through the co-ordination of on the ground, food-related activity which tackles the root-causes of food poverty. The funding includes £0.5m to help meet growing demand for emergency food provision as a result of the cost-of-living crisis.

The First Minister announced a further **£1m** funding for food support on 20 September.

- **The social wage** – Collectively, a range of Welsh Government policies help to keep money in people’s pockets – we call this the social wage. These include:
 - Childcare Offer – we provide 48 hours of funded childcare a year for working parents of three and four-year-olds
 - Free school meals (being extended to primary schools from September 2022) and free school breakfasts
 - Free prescriptions
 - Help with Health Costs
 - Council Tax Reduction Scheme
 - The PDG Access scheme
- **Credit unions** – An extra **£620k** has been made available for credit unions in 2022-23 to continue an intensive digital marketing campaign and expand their lending so they can support more financially vulnerable people. This is in addition to £500k already in place to support the work of credit unions. A No Interest Loan Scheme will begin in Wales this year, which will support more people to access affordable credit when they need it.
- **Helping families who have lost a child with the cost of funerals.** In 2017, we removed burial and cremation fees for children and young people under 18. In 2021, we have provided additional financial support to help towards funeral costs - £500 is available to any family in Wales who has lost a child.
- Pay rise for around 500 people working in Welsh Government arm’s length bodies by **addressing pay disparities**. Workers in [nine arm’s length bodies](#) – Arts Council Wales; Careers Wales; Commissioner for Future Generations; Commissioner for Older People; Social Care Wales; Higher Education Funding Council for Wales; National Library of Wales; National Museum Wales and Sports Wales – will be paid at least the same as the minimum

salary for their equivalent Welsh Government grade. Around 500 staff across the nine organisations are expected to receive an uplift in salary backdated to 1 April 2021.

Support for social care staff/carers/care leavers

- **Real Living Wage** for social care workers. Eligible social care staff will receive the real living wage from April 2022 as a first step towards raising wages and esteem across the sector. The 2022-23 Budget includes **£43m** to enable health boards and local authorities to implement the real living wage, recognising staff for their extraordinary contribution to the coronavirus pandemic.

To help social care staff meet the cost-of-living crisis, Deputy Minister for Social Services Julie Morgan announced an extra **£96m** to make additional payments of almost £1,500 (gross) to social care staff who will benefit from the real living wage. The move is also part of our longer-term ambition to raise the status of and professional standards in social care.

- **£10m for local authorities to support domiciliary care workers** – this includes funding used to pay for driving lessons for domiciliary care workers and purchase electric fleet vehicles to improve staff access to vehicles to increase service capacity.
- **Basic income pilot.** All young people leaving care who turn 18 during a 12-month-period, will be offered the opportunity to take part in the pilot. Starting on 1 July, more than 500 young people will be eligible to join the scheme.

The pilot will run for a minimum of three years and each member will receive a basic income payment of £1,600 per month (before tax) for two years from the month after their 18th birthday. Care leavers have helped to develop the pilot. A technical advisory group, chaired by Professor Sir Michael Marmot, which brings together experts in basic income and support for care leavers will help to inform the development and evaluation of the pilot.

- **£500 support payment for unpaid carers** – will be available to some 57,000 unpaid carers receiving Carers Allowance, in recognition of the financial and emotional challenges they have faced over the course of the pandemic. Registration details will be available from the end of April 2022.
- **Unpaid carers** of all ages in Wales will benefit from a **£9m** fund to set up a new **national short breaks scheme**. The three-year investment will increase opportunities for unpaid carers to take a break from their caring role and will deliver a key Programme for Government commitment.
- We've invested a further **£4.5m** in the **Carers Support Fund**, over three years, to help unpaid carers with the cost-of-living crisis. Carers will be able to apply for grants of up to £300 to pay for food, household items and electronic items. Support services, such as counselling, financial advice, wellbeing and peer support will also be available.

Emergency support

- We have invested in the **Discretionary Assistance Fund** and made it more flexible to support people who need emergency and urgent help during the pandemic.

These flexibilities allow an increased number and greater frequency of payments where Covid is a factor and have now been extended to include people impacted by the withdrawal of the Universal Credit £20 uplift.

We have also re-instated the winter fuel assistance for off-grid homes and boiler repair grants between 1 October and 31 March.

As part of the 2022-23 final budget, a further £15m has been made available for DAF. This will help extend flexibilities until March 2023, ensuring more people receive emergency financial support when they need it. This is in addition to the budget uplift of £7m per year for the next three years.

We have extended DAF support throughout the summer and winter to the end of March 2023 for off-grid households, which are unable to afford their next delivery of oil or LPG due to extreme financial hardship. This will help those households with up to £250 for a one-off oil payment or up to three payments of £70 for LPG.

Housing support

- **Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP)** – The reduction in DHP funding available to Welsh local authorities in this financial year, amounts to a 27% cut – £2.3m – compared to 2021-22. This follows a previous reduction in 2021-22 by the UK Government of £1.8m (18%) compared to the previous financial year. [Written statement](#) by Minister for Climate Change Julie James has more detail.

Helping people on benefits

- **Income maximisation and benefit take-up** – It is critical people understand and have help to access all the financial support available to them. We are doing all we can to put money into the pockets of people across Wales. We have run two *Claim What's Yours* campaigns – in March 2021 and March 2022. This year, more than 8,000 people responded to the campaign's call to action to contact Advicelink Cymru. They were helped to claim more than £2.1m of additional income. A further campaign will run in autumn 2022.
- The **Single Advice Fund's** benefit advice services, which were launched, in January 2020, help people navigate the benefit system to better understand what they may be entitled to and how to claim. During the first six months of 2021-22 they helped people to claim additional income of £17m. The current grant funding for the Single Advice Fund has been confirmed until March 2023 and, subject to budget confirmation, the Minister for Social Justice has

extended the grant funding until March 2024.

- **Healthy Start** is available to people who are more than 10 weeks pregnant or have a child under four and are in receipt of certain benefits. Healthy Start cards can be used in all retailers that sell food and accept MasterCard.

They can be used to buy:

- Cow's milk
- Fresh, frozen and tinned fruit and vegetables
- Dried and tinned pulses
- First infant formula milk

Free Healthy Start vitamins are also available. People could be entitled to more than £1,200 to spend on healthy food but about 40% of people who are eligible are not claiming this entitlement.

Help with the costs of education

- **PDG Access** provides support to families with the costs of sending children to school. Up to £200 is available to help families who are eligible for free school meals with the extra costs associated with going to school, such as buying uniform, sports kit and equipment for other extra-curricular activities.

The Education Minister has announced an extra £3.3m to expand the scheme – it was previously only available to children in certain school years; it will now be available to children in all years from reception to year 11.

A further £13m was announced on 13 March, to provide families across Wales, who are eligible for help through the PDG Access Grant, with a one-off £100 top-up payment in 2022-23 to help with the costs of sending their children to school.

- **Education maintenance allowance** – EMA of £30 a week is available to 16 to 18-year-olds who live and are studying full-time academic or vocational courses.
- **Student support** – Wales provides the most generous package of student support for first-time undergraduates and post-graduate students in the UK to help fund their day-to-day living costs during term time, regardless of where in the UK they choose to study.

The support is a mixture of grants and loans and is equivalent to the national living wage. All eligible full-time students will receive a grant of at least £1,000 regardless of household income. The support package means that students can spend more time focusing on their studies and less time worrying about making ends meet. Most students won't have to pay anything upfront for their course.

When Welsh students start repaying their **student loans**, the Welsh Government could cancel up to £1,500 from any full-time maintenance loan balance. More information is available [here](#).

- **Free school meals** are being rolled out to primary school pupils from September 2022. We have made **£25m** available to local authorities to make adaptations to primary school kitchens and will provide **£35m** more to extend free school meals to more than 6,000 **nursery-age pupils** attending a maintained primary school for at least two full sessions, on any one day a week.

We are funding free school meal provision in the school holidays to the end of the February half-term 2023.

- We are capping **student loan interest rates** at a lower rate of 6.3% for three months from 1 September 2022. The rate of inflation which determines the interest charged on certain loans reached 9% in the year to March 2022. Interest rates would rise to up to 12% from September 2022 for a period of time before rates are capped. The Welsh Government must ensure that rates do not exceed the prevailing market rate and has taken action three times in the last year to cap the rate on loans and protect students. Further rate caps may be applied if the prevailing market rate continues to be below student loan interest rates.
- £7.4m to provide **Summer of Fun** activities for children and young people aged up to 25 from 1 July to 30 September across Wales. Summer of Fun activities will be open to all refugee children and families in Wales, including people from Ukraine.