

Residents facing financial challenges can get HELP over half term

Cheshire West and Chester Council is extending the hours of its HELP phonenumber over May half term, ensuring residents facing fuel, food and other emergencies can speak to someone and access support if they need to.

The Council's Help in Emergencies for Local People (HELP) scheme runs all year, and the hours it is open will be extended during the holidays. The scheme will be available on Saturday 28 May and Sunday 29 May, 10am – 4pm, throughout half term week (including the two bank holiday days), 8am – 6pm, and on Saturday 4 June and Sunday 5 June, 10am – 4pm. The phone number is: 0300 123 7065 and email: help@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk.

Cllr Carol Gahan, Cabinet Member for Finance and Legal, said: "This is a challenging time for some of our residents who are finding it difficult to meet the increasing cost of living, and we are extending our HELP phonenumber hours to make sure people can get help when they need it.

"We are committed to providing support for anyone in financial hardship, and we are working with members of our community and partners to ensure new funding, provided recently through the Household Support Fund, is adding to the schemes we already having running, so we can help as many people as possible."

In April 2022, the Council was awarded £2,290,047 as part of the Government's £421 million Household Support Fund to support those most in need, due to rising costs of living, especially for food and fuel.

The guidance on the Household Support Fund specifies how the temporary funds are to be allocated in supporting vulnerable groups with fuel, food and other emergency costs. The Council has been working with The Welcome Network, The Poverty Truth Advisory Board (which includes residents with experience of financial hardship) and other organisations to devise its proposal for the allocation of the temporary funds.

The change in guidance has meant that careful consideration has been needed to ensure the Council maximises the reach of the temporary funds to as many residents as possible, whilst adhering to requirements. A change of approach has been adopted for this half term.

- The Help scheme will be available over the two weekends of half term
- The Help scheme will temporarily extend its phone lines hours, 8am - 6pm
- The Help scheme will be available over the two bank holiday days, 8am - 6pm
- The Help scheme will issue Paypoint vouchers where a food bank referral is not an appropriate solution
- Signposting will be provided to other support where appropriate

In addition Council plans are well under way for a significant Holiday Activity Fund programme this summer, incorporating the Household Support Fund. This will be used to provide supermarket vouchers to those in receipt of free school meals during the summer break, alongside maximising the wider reach of the Household Support Fund to residents who need it.