

Cheshire West and Chester Council

Cost of Living **Support**

7 May 2025



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.



Latest news on the government's Household Support Fund

The government's Household Support Fund is there to support households in the most need, especially with energy costs, food, water bills and other related essential items. The new round provides funding until 31 March 2026.

Cheshire West and Chester have chosen to spend the money in the following ways:

- food vouchers for families with children who get free school meals
- payments to Pensioners who receive Pension Credit
- payments to Pensioners on a low income who are not receiving Pension Credit and therefore no longer qualify for the Winter Fuel Payment support
- making financial support available to people via local charitable organisations
- helping low-income households with energy and food costs
- income maximisation software to support residents to claim all of their eligible entitlements.

The new round of **discretionary funding** for 2025/26 will open by **16 May 2025** for applications and is available to a broad range of low-income households across the borough, including families with children of all ages, pensioners, unpaid carers, care leavers and disabled people. The discretionary scheme is **only** open to households which have an active claim for Housing Benefit or Council Tax Reduction.

More information including how to apply can be found using the link below.

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

During **June**, we will be contacting eligible Pension Credit customers directly to advise how to claim the support.

In the **Autumn**, we will be directly contacting eligible low-income pensioners who are not receiving Pension Credit, to advise how to claim the support. More details will be provided in future newsletters.

Additional support and advice is available for anyone who is struggling to pay their bills, requires debt advice or who's health has been affected by the rising cost of living.

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



Skills and Employment Hubs

Skills and Employment Hubs (previously called Work Zones) are the 'front door' to Skills and Employment services. There are Hubs in Chester, Ellesmere Port, Winsford and Northwich, which you can drop into without an appointment. Or if you'd prefer, support is available over the phone or via Microsoft Teams.

Skills and Employment Hubs offer a range of services to support you in identifying and developing your job hunting and employability skills.

It is free to register for Hub support in person (at one of our Skills and Employment Hubs), by telephone or by email. There is no charge for courses if you are unemployed and/or receiving means-tested benefits. You must be aged 19 or above to access this support.

Some examples of the help on offer:

- Personal skills analysis and action planning.
- Confidence building courses.
- Qualifications to prepare for employment.
- Refresh your English, maths and IT skills with opportunities to gain qualifications.
- Free access to computers for job searching and applications.

Location and contact information for your nearest Hub, plus information about what training is available during May and beyond can be found using the link below.

The page also includes information about employment support for adults with physical and mental health conditions and details about the Supported Employment Service for adults with learning disabilities and/or autism. Plus, what support is available if you've been made redundant or are at risk of redundancy, and more...

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



Do you want to quit smoking?

Quitting smoking is the best thing you can do for your health, and it can save you money too. In Cheshire West and Chester fewer people smoke than ever before (10.5 per cent, which is approximately 30,899 people) but, sadly, smoking remains the leading cause of preventable ill-health and early death.

Every quit begins with a serious quit attempt and evidence shows that it can take several attempts before you are successful.

Getting support really boosts your chances of quitting – smokers are up to three times as likely to succeed.

Cheshire West and Chester Council offers a universal stop smoking, **free** service operated by Brio which supports anyone over the age of 12 living or registered with a GP in the borough to quit smoking.

To find out more you can call **0300 777 0033** or visit Brio's smoking cessation page.

<http://www.brioleisure.org/what-we-offer/wellbeing/smoking-cessation>



Are you eligible for Pension Credit?

If you're over state pension age or you know someone aged 66 or over, you may be able to claim Pension Credit and also likely qualify for the warm home allowance.

Pension Credit tops up weekly income to a guaranteed minimum level of £227.10 a week for single pensioners or £346.60 for couples.

It is a tax-free payment for those who:

- have reached Pension Credit qualifying age, which is State Pension age, and
- live in Great Britain.

Someone may still get Pension Credit if they:

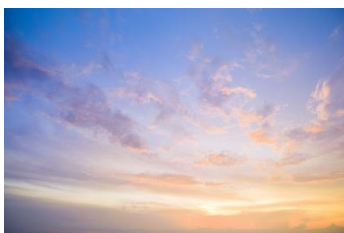
- have not paid National Insurance contributions
- have some savings or a small pension
- live with their grown-up family
- own their own home.

You can use the Pension Credit calculator to find out how much Pension Credit you could get – without giving any personal details.

<https://www.gov.uk/pension-credit-calculator>

This video from the Department for Work and Pensions shows you how to use the Pension Credit eligibility calculator.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=thx5cpXVaUc>



Wellbeing coaches helping residents build healthier lives

Free wellbeing coaching is available for residents of Cheshire West and Chester who are looking for help to reset their drinking or drug use.

The Re-new programme is a six-week course of private one-to-one sessions where people can explore their relationship with alcohol or drugs and how to

break the cycle.

During the sessions, individuals can work through how to build healthy habits, manage strong emotions, boost their self-confidence or manage daily stresses like family or relationships.

They can also explore what motivates them and how to support their physical and mental health.

Aaron, 22, (not his real name) took part in Re-new as he felt he needed support to reduce his drinking. He said:

“I was using alcohol as a coping mechanism when I felt low. Without Re-new I think this would have continued and I'd have become alcohol dependent.

Now I've learned to drink in a controlled way when I'm out with friends and, even then, I only drink if I feel I want to. I feel like alcohol does not have any control over my life anymore, it's no longer consuming my thoughts."

Cllr Lisa Denson, the Council's Cabinet Member for A Fairer Future (Poverty, Public Health and Mental Health), said:

"This is a great new programme for people who are worried that they are drinking a bit too much or have a growing problem with drugs. It's there to help people to curb their habits if they feel they're getting a little out of control – it's a rethink and a reset, providing people with the coping strategies they might need to cut down.

"As a Council we're proud to support this programme as part of our work to help our residents flourish, be healthy and happy and to build a stronger future for our borough."

Re-new is not a service for dependent drinkers or drug users, instead it provides early intervention for people who are concerned about their increasing level of alcohol or drug use.

The programme includes an hour-long wellbeing coaching session, once a week for six weeks.

These take place in private with a wellbeing coach who will listen and offer friendly and supportive advice and guidance.

Sessions can take place in person, at a venue to suit the individual, or online, and appointments are available during daytime, evenings or weekends.

The Re-new programme is open, for free, to any Cheshire West and Chester resident aged 18 or over.

To find out more and sign up visit:

<https://www.viaorg.uk/re-new-cheshire/>

Residents can also sign up by texting: RENEWCESHIRE to 82228, calling: 0300 303 2717 or emailing: renewcheshire@viaorg.uk.

Re-new has been launched by Via, the substance misuse service commissioned by Cheshire West and Chester Council to help people cope with their alcohol or drug issues.

The Council and Via are members of the Cheshire West and Chester Combatting Drugs Partnership, which brings together resources, expertise and experiences from a number of partners to tackle substance misuse.

It is part of a national 10-year drug strategy, 'From harm to hope', which is a roadmap for tackling drug and alcohol related issues in society.

Community stories



Buy safe and stay safe

Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service understands that buying electrical items can be costly. With the added expense of everyday life, it might be tempting to cut costs when shopping for electrical products. However, doing so can pose serious fire safety risks.

To keep your home and loved ones safe, follow these simple tips:

Shop smart, shop safe: Always buy electrical products from trusted, reputable retailers. Check for the British or European safety mark.

Charge with care: Use the correct charger for your device and avoid charging devices overnight or unattended. Don't overload extension leads and never mix incompatible chargers or batteries. Do not charge products in hallways or escape routes in case a fire starts.

Follow the manual: Check that the product comes with the correct instructions or registration card. Read the manual to ensure you're using the item safely and correctly.

Check for wear and tear: Regularly check for frayed or worn cables and wires. Scorch marks on sockets and plugs indicate overheating. Keep your electricals clean and in good working order.

Have a concern? If you suspect a product is unsafe, stop using it immediately. Contact the manufacturer or Citizens Advice to report unsafe items and help protect others.

Remember, in case of a fire, Get Out, Stay Out, and Call 999.

More information about electrical fire safety can be found on the Cheshire Fire & Rescue Service website – search 'Electrical fire safety'.

Learn about safer purchasing of e-bikes and e-scooters on the GOV.UK website – search 'Buy safe stay safe'.



Citizens Advice Energy Team

We're here to help you make your home more energy-efficient, reduce your energy bills, and take control of your energy use. Whether you own or rent, our team offers expert advice, guidance, and resources to help you save energy and money.

Energy Advice – Free & Confidential

Our trained advisors provide tailored advice to help you reduce your energy usage, save on bills, and make your home more energy efficient. We offer advice through the following channels:

- Home visits
- Telephone appointments
- In-office appointments

We'll help you understand your energy bills, explain tariffs, and ensure you're on the best energy plan for your needs. If you're struggling to pay your bills, we'll help you access financial support options appropriate for you.

Advice and information is also available on current energy grants and schemes, and referral pathways for council grants (which can include, subject to eligibility, the installation of new first time central heating systems, boiler upgrades and insulation); how to make and support applications to trust funds and help to sign up to the priority service register.

How we helped in 2024

- 200 home visits
- 3,000 households provided with in-depth energy advice through appointments, phone, email and drop-in events
- Over 4,000 households helped with light touch energy saving information at community events

- 1132 households helped with heating costs through our Heating Bank

To request a telephone assessment and for more information visit our website at www.citizensadvicecw.org.uk/our-projects/energy-advice-service

The Team



Sara



Kay



Richard



Lisa

Case Study

Bernard lives alone, is self-employed and in receipt of Universal Credit. Worsening physical and mental health made it harder for Bernard to work, reducing his income significantly. Bernard's home had no central heating, relying on a coal fire for heat and back boiler for hot water. Bernard was struggling to afford to buy coal and living in cold conditions. Our Energy Adviser was able to provide crisis support, supplying coal, logs, duvets and blankets through the Household Support Fund and identified that Bernard was eligible for the government ECO4 grant. Bernard's grant application was successful, and he had first time central heating installed into his home, resulting in better energy efficiency, more affordable energy bills and a warm home with hot water, having a positive impact on his wellbeing.



Brio's Integrated Wellbeing Services: Looking after your health shouldn't come at a cost.

As the cost of living continues to impact communities across Cheshire West and Chester, Brio is offering a range of **free** wellbeing services to support local residents to stay active, live healthier lives and remain independent during these challenging times. Whether you're trying to manage your weight, quit smoking or reduce your risk of falling, our Integrated Wellbeing Services are here to help.

These services are designed to remove barriers to health and wellbeing, especially for individuals and families experiencing financial pressures. All programmes are free to eligible participants and are delivered locally in community settings, making it easier than ever to take that first step towards better health.

Tier 2 Adult Weight Management Programme

A 12-week programme that blends physical activity, nutrition advice, and personalised support to help people lose weight and feel healthier. Participants also receive follow-ups at 6 and 12 months to keep them on track.

Who is eligible?

- Aged 18 years or over
- Resident or registered with a GP in Cheshire West and Chester
- BMI ≥ 30 (adjusted to ≥ 27.5 for Black African, African-Caribbean and Asian populations)
- Diagnosed with one of the following:
 - Learning disability

- Severe mental illness (bipolar disorder, schizophrenia or psychosis)
- Hypertension (prescribed antihypertensive medication)
- Physical disability affecting the ability to exercise

Go Smokefree Programme

A 12-week stop smoking service that offers free Nicotine Replacement Therapy (NRT) and personalised support, available by phone, appointment or drop-in. Focused on helping those most affected by health inequalities.

Who is eligible?

- Aged 12 years or over, motivated to quit smoking
- Resident or registered with a GP in Cheshire West and Chester
- Smoked tobacco in the last two weeks or started a quit attempt through the NHS Tobacco Dependency Treatment Service

Falls Prevention Programme

This 25-week programme supports older adults to stay mobile and independent. Weekly strength and balance classes are complemented by at-home exercises and home safety education.

Who is eligible?

- Aged 65 or over
- Resident or registered with a GP in Cheshire West and Chester
- Assessed as having a low to medium risk of falls

How to access support

You can be referred by a GP, health or social care professional – or in some cases you can self-refer (for the Go Smokefree Programme).

If you or someone you support could benefit from this service, don't wait. Brio is here to help.

Find out more

To discover more about Brio Wellbeing and explore all our free services and programmes, please visit our new website.

www.brioleisure.org/what-we-offer/wellbeing