

Important update for schools: Changes to support funds for families

Dear Headteacher,

We are writing to update you on national changes to household support funding and to outline how Essex County Council will continue supporting families across the county.

As you will be aware, the Government has ended the Household Support Fund (HSF) with effect from March 2026. This means the food voucher scheme previously funded through HSF has now closed, and no further food vouchers will be issued under this programme.

We recognise that this change may raise questions from families, and we want to reassure you that support for vulnerable households will continue and will be delivered through new arrangements and via a new fund.

The Crisis and Resilience Fund (CRF) will launch on 1 April 2026. This fund is designed to support low-income households facing sudden financial pressures.

It also aims to help build long term financial resilience across communities.

The CRF will include:

- crisis payments for urgent, unexpected financial pressures
- housing payments to support households with shortfalls in housing costs
- resilience services including financial guidance, money management support and access to wider community services

Details on how families will be able to apply for support will be shared with schools before the scheme launches in April.

Support for families during school holidays

Although national voucher funding has ended, Essex County Council is expanding the Holiday Activity and Food (HAF) programme.

This means more eligible children will have access to:

- free and enriching holiday activities
- free nutritious food
- opportunities to socialise, be active and learn new skills

Booking details will continue to be issued to eligible families via schools and HAF providers.

We have included some links below that you may find useful and may want to share with families. We have also included some Q&As that you might find useful should you get any further questions from families.

Free Holiday and Food clubs - [Essex Activate | Active Essex](#)

Support before April 1, which includes support from the Essential Living Fund, visit - [Help with the cost of living: Household Support Fund | Essex County Council](#)

Thank you for your continued support.

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Q&As

1. Why are there no more free holiday food vouchers?

The holiday food vouchers were funded through the national Household Support Fund (HSF). The government fund has now ended this scheme. This means that the Council is no longer able to issue vouchers through that scheme.

The last vouchers were provided in December 2025.

Although the voucher scheme is closed, support for families has not stopped.

Essex County Council has put in place new forms of support through the government's Crisis and Resilience Fund (CRF), launching on 1 April. The council is also increasing Holiday Activity and Food (HAF) sessions across the county. These free clubs will offer free childcare, nutritious food and activities for children.

2. Who decided there would be no more free food vouchers?

The decision to end the vouchers was made by the UK Government.

Local councils must follow national guidance which states that issuing vouchers under this fund is not permitted.

3. I'm not happy about there being no more vouchers – who do I complain to?

You can share feedback directly with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), which oversees national welfare funding.

Anyone in financial hardship and needing urgent support should visit - [Help with the cost of living: Household Support Fund | Essex County Council](#)

4. What support is there instead of food vouchers?

Support is still available.

From April 1 people needing support can apply to the Crisis Resilience Fund for:

- **crisis payments** to help residents facing urgent financial shock
- **housing payments** for those struggling with housing costs
- **resilience services**, which offer help with budgeting, financial guidance and wider support

Expanded Holiday Activity and Food (HAF) sessions are also available via Activate.

These free clubs give eligible children access to free activities and healthy meals during the school holidays.

These new options aim to provide more flexible and longer-term support than vouchers alone.

5. How do I get this support?

Essex residents will be able to apply for Crisis Payments and Housing payments through a simple online application when the new scheme launches in April 2026.

Information about eligibility and how to apply will be published on the Essex County Council website.

Families whose children are eligible for HAF/Activate will receive information through their school and can book sessions online or through participating providers.

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