

Support with the cost of living

As energy, fuel, inflation, and food prices continue to rise, it's important everyone knows how to access the benefits, payments, and support options available to them.

We recently launched a dedicated cost of living information hub on our website, full of information and resources to help you. Visit www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/cost-of-living.

There are local and national schemes that can help you with rent, food, energy and more.

This year is set to be tough for everybody, especially those on low incomes and Central Bedfordshire Council will continue to support you. If you are struggling, please contact us or one of our partner agencies for advice and support.

Help with income

It is more important than ever that people are getting the support they're entitled to.

Turn2us offers a free online **benefits checker**, check what you could be entitled to today at <https://benefits-calculator.turn2us.org.uk>. If you are not online contact your nearest Citizen's Advice (see contact details below).

Nationally we know there are millions of people who are entitled to but are not claiming **Pension Credit**. Anyone over 66 years of age can check their eligibility and apply, visit www.gov.uk/pension-credit or call 0800 99 1234.



Help with bills

The Government has introduced some schemes to help with energy bills.

From October 2022, a new **Energy Price Guarantee** will reduce the unit cost of electricity and gas for all households. You do not need to apply for this.

The **Energy Bills Support Scheme** gives all households £400 off their energy bills. You do not need to apply; this discount will be applied automatically over six instalments between October 2022 and March 2023.

If you claim certain benefits or tax credits, you may be eligible for an extra **Cost of Living Payment** from the Government. If you're eligible, you will receive a payment of £650 this year, paid automatically in two instalments. The first payment was made in the Summer and the second is due in the winter, visit www.gov.uk/winter-fuel-payment.

A **Winter Fuel Payment** of £100-£300 is available for pensioners plus a one-off extra £300 which will be paid as an automatic top up to the Winter Fuel Payment. Visit www.gov.uk/winter-fuel-payment.

Other payments are also available such as **Cold Weather Payments** and **Warm Home Discount**. Check online at www.gov.uk for eligibility.

If you are concerned about your energy costs, it is important you speak to your provider to check you are on the best deal and see if they can help you. Ofgem provide further advice on their website:

www.ofgem.gov.uk/energy-advice-households

Energy saving tips

The following energy saving tips might be helpful:

- Avoid using your tumble dryer if you can
- Change to LED bulbs which are energy efficient and cost less to run
- Don't overfill your kettle – just boil the water you need and descale it regularly
- Shower instead of having a bath and set a shower timer or use a water saving shower head
- Wash a full load in your washing machine or dishwasher, use eco-cycles and wash lightly used clothes at 30°C
- Don't leave your devices on standby, turn them off at the plug
- A microwave, slow cooker or air fryer might be more energy efficient than the oven
- Turn down radiators when rooms aren't in use and reduce your boiler flow temperature
- Keep the heat inside by closing your curtains, draught proofing your doors and windows and insulating your loft. If you are a tenant, you should contact your landlord if your loft is not insulated or needs better insulation



For more energy saving tips, visit www.ofgem.gov.uk/energy-advice-households/actions-saving-energy.

Help with home improvements

We have funding available to help low-income households make their homes warmer, more energy efficient and therefore cheaper to run. If your annual a gross household income is less than £30,000, and your property has an Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) rating of D, E, F or G you could be eligible for funding. Apply online before the end of December 2022 at www.bedfordshire-applications.co.uk or call City Energy on 02921 680951.

Council Tax Support

You may be able to get help with your Council Tax. Residents on low incomes, which can include disabled residents and carers, are entitled to support. Visit www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/council-tax-support or call 0300 300 8306.

Phone or Broadband

If you're having difficulty paying for your phone or broadband service speak to your provider. They might be able to offer you a **social tariff**, which is a cheaper package available to some customers depending on their circumstances.

Help with debt

If you are struggling to pay your bills, it is important you talk to your provider as soon as possible.

If you need help with this, we help to fund advice organisations like Advice Central, Disability Resource Centre and Citizens Advice who can support you. There are three local Citizen's Advice organisations which provide impartial financial management advice, debt advice and help to make sure residents apply for the different benefits they might be eligible for.

- Advice Central - www.advicecentral.org.uk or call 0300 303 6666
- Disability Resource Centre - www.drcbeds.org.uk or call 01582 470 900
- Citizens Advice (Dunstable) - www.dunstablecab.org.uk or call 01582 670 003
- Citizens Advice (Mid Bedfordshire) - www.midbedscab.org.uk or call 01767 601 368
- Citizens Advice (Leighton Linlade) - www.leightonlinladedcab.org.uk or call 01525 373 878

Housing support

If you are starting to struggle with paying your rent or mortgage, get in touch with our housing team who can advise you. Don't wait until you are at risk of becoming homeless, the sooner we can help you the better.

If you are a Central Bedfordshire Council tenant and you need advice on paying your rent, visit www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/rent-support or call 0300 300 8042. If you're a Housing association or registered provider tenant, contact your landlord directly to discuss the options available to you.

We can provide a **Discretionary Housing Payment** to help with your housing costs if you get Housing Benefit or the housing costs element of Universal Credit and live in Central Bedfordshire. You can apply online at www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/dhp or call 0300 300 8306.

If you are at risk of being homeless, visit www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/homeless or call 0300 300 4370 during office hours. If you're in need of emergency accommodation outside office hours, call 0300 300 8098.

Our online tool can provide advice on a number of topics, including finding a home, different housing options, housing repairs and eviction. Visit <https://centralbedfordshire.adviceaid.uk/start>.

Warm Spaces

We are also creating a network of 'Warm Spaces' across Central Bedfordshire, which residents can use during the day to keep warm as temperatures fall and energy prices rise.

The council's **12 libraries and six leisure centres** are available as Warm Spaces, where everyone is welcome. Four of our six leisure centres have cafes available for people to use, and libraries offer free Wi-Fi and access to public computers, as well as seating so people can enjoy time with a book. You are welcome to take your own food and drink to the libraries.

Other organisations are also providing Warm Spaces. You can find your nearest Warm Space online at www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/warm-spaces.



Food vouchers and foodbanks

We have a local Household Support Scheme, where households with children eligible for free school meals, care leavers, some disabled residents, residents in receipt of Council Tax Support who haven't already received support and those living in park homes or caravan sites on low incomes can receive food vouchers. We will contact these residents directly. If you think you are eligible but haven't been contacted, visit www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/hsg.



We help to fund numerous **foodbanks** across Central Bedfordshire. Further information is available on our website at www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/food-banks.

- The NEED Project (referral only) - www.theneedproject.org or call 07952 765 302
- Biggleswade Baptist Church Food Bank - www.bbchurch.org.uk/foodbank or call 01767 312 667
- Biggleswade Preen - www.preenreuse.com or call 01767 600 332
- Dunstable Foodbank - www.dunstable.foodbank.org.uk or call 07874 200 056
- Leighton Linlade Homeless Shelter Foodbank - www.llhsblackhorse.org.uk or call 01525 381 129
- Leighton Linlade Helpers - www.leightonlinladehelpers.org.uk or call 01525 837 219

Emergency funding

We have an emergency funding scheme where we can provide funding following an emergency or crisis to meet the immediate day-to-day expenses relating to food and utilities. Supermarket vouchers and top-ups for pre-paid energy meters are provided to meet these needs. You do not need to be in receipt of any benefit or entitlement.

You can apply online for our **Local Welfare Provision** at www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/lwp.

From December 2022, families with children that are known to our Children Centre's or are referred to our Children's Centres by health, housing or education partners can access our **Crisis Fund**. We have Children's Centres in Sandy, Shefford, Stotfold, Flitwick, Leighton Buzzard, with two in Dunstable and two in Houghton Regis.

Looking after your wellbeing and mental health

If you are feeling worried about your situation and how you will cope, there are organisations you can talk to.

If you need help now, call the NHS on 111 and select option 2.

- Bedfordshire Wellbeing Service - www.bedfordshirewellbeing.service.nhs.uk or call 01234 880 400
- Mind BLMK – call 0300 330 0648
- The Silver Line (for older people) – call 08004 708 090
- Samaritans - www.samaritans.org or call 116 123
- Shout Crisis Text line - Text Shout to 85258
- CALM (for men) - www.thecalmzone.net or call 0800 58 58 58 (5pm- midnight)