Collect children’s coats to help families facing struggles this winter

With winter fast approaching and as the cost of living continues to rise, many families in Dorset are feeling the strain.

We’ve been encouraging residents to donate clean and undamaged children’s coats, hats, and gloves for those aged 0-16, and they can now be collected.

This heartfelt initiative aims to ensure that no child goes without essential winter clothing during these challenging times. The council recognises the importance of addressing this issue and is calling on the community to join forces in helping those who are struggling.

Cllr Byron Quayle, Dorset Council Portfolio Holder for Children, Education and Early Help said:

“In the face of rising living costs, we urge our Dorset residents to come together and make a difference. By donating, you can provide vital warmth and support to local families this winter.

“It is essential that all donated items must be clean and in good condition and for children aged 0-16 years old.”

Residents can collect their donations at: The Shaftesbury Children’s Centre, Wincombe Lane, Shaftesbury, SP7 8PZ.

Monday to Friday, 9.30am to 4pm. A designated donation box is located at the entrance. Items can also be dropped off.

The cost of living is still affecting many of us right now. We’re working with Dorset Citizen’s Advice to offer help, support and advice on issues such as:

* money, benefits, bills and debts
* access to food
* housing for renters and owners
* support for children
* mental health and wellbeing
* utilities such as gas and water
* employment rights

Visit our [Cost of Living Help](https://www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/cost-of-living-help) webpage to get started.

Household Support Fund

Round 4 of the Household Support Fund (HSF) opened for applications at 10am on Thursday 2 November 2023 for low-income households in the Dorset Council area.

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) has given local authorities funding to support residents throughout the year. In Dorset, this support is in the form of supermarket vouchers and applications open each month for eligible households.

Citizens Advice will be allocating this fund on behalf of Dorset Council and vouchers will be issued to residents who meet the eligibility criteria within 6 – 8 weeks.

Dorset Council households will be able to apply if they have:

* an annual household net income of less than £30,000 and
* savings of less than £16,000 and
* **not applied** for a previous HSF payment within the last 6 months

Calculations for the annual net income should not include Personal Independence Payments, Disability Living Allowance, Attendance Allowance, Carers Allowance or Child Benefit. Applications are limited to one per household.

Starting on 2 November, we’re reopening this support that offers supermarket vouchers to those in need. We’re committed to ensuring our community’s needs are met.

“If you do miss out on this window, another will open on Tuesday 5 December at 10am.”

Residents should apply online. Find more details including future application window dates here: <https://www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/household-support-fund>

If you need help completing the form, you can telephone Customer Services on 01305 221000 or visit a [customer access point](https://www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/visit-us).

Dorset residents invited to register to vote by post

Residents in Dorset will go to the polls to elect councillors for Dorset Council and Town and Parish Councils on 2 May 2024.

The Dorset Police and Crime Commissioner election will also take place on the same day.

Residents in Dorset who are not [registered to vote](https://www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/councillors-committees-elections/elections-and-voting/register-to-vote) are encouraged to do so now ahead of the local elections.

This includes anyone who has moved home or changed their names since the last annual canvass.

Registering is the first step in the voting process. The second is choosing which method to use to vote, either in person, by post, or by appointing someone trusted to vote on your behalf, which is known as a proxy vote.

You can now apply to vote [by post](https://www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/-/voting-by-post) or [by proxy](https://www.gov.uk/apply-proxy-vote) online.  Alternatively, you can download an application form from the [Electoral Commission website](http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/i-am-a/voter/how-cast-your-vote).  If you want to vote by post or proxy, you will need to apply by 5pm on Wednesday 17 April.

Once you have registered for a postal vote, a pack will be posted to your address a few weeks prior to the election.

If you plan to vote at a polling station, you will need a photo ID.  Don’t have one? You can apply for free voter ID [here](https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/i-am-a/voter/voter-id/applying-a-voter-authority-certificate)

Cllr Val Pothecary.