South Gloucestershire Council

Cost of living FAQs

06 July 2026

Frequently Asked Questions for schools:

Is my child eligible for free school meals?

There are now three ways your child may receive free school meals

- **Targeted**: For children whose family receives Universal Credit or other benefits and have annual household earnings of £7,400 or less. As well as free school meals throughout their education up until the age of 19, this also unlocks extra funding to support your child's education and access to our Holiday Activities and Food programme.
- **Expanded**: From September 2026, children whose family receives Universal Credit and have annual household earnings of more than £7,400. This provides free school meals throughout your child's education up to the age of 19.
- **Universal**: This provides free school meals for all children in reception to Year 2.

Apply for targeted or expanded free school meals from when they start in reception. Annual checks are carried out.

www.southglos.gov.uk/freeschoolmeals

Is my child eligible for the Holiday Activities and Food programme?

If your child receives targeted (previously referred to as benefits-related) free school meals, they may be entitled to a place on our Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) programme.

Free places are not available for children who receive expanded free school meals or universal infant free school meals. However, you may still be able to book and pay for a place at one of our providers.

Clubs in the main school holidays (Easter, summer and Christmas) offer a wider variety of activity including crafts, sports, cooking and theatre. Eligible children can be booked on up to a club of their choice and will receive a healthy, nutritious free meal while they are there. Places are available for children aged 5 to 16.

Go to www.southglos.gov.uk/HAF or email HAF@southglos.gov.uk for more information.

How do I find out if I am eligible and apply for Universal Credit?

Universal Credit provides regular payments to help people meet everyday costs. Households who receive Universal Credit can often claim other support with things like energy bills, social tariffs, healthcare and from September 2026, free school meals throughout a child's education up until the age of 19.

You may be eligible for Universal Credit if your household income is low or you need help with living costs. You can check if you are eligible at www.gov.uk/universal-credit

In South Gloucestershire, there is help to check if you're eligible and apply through South Glos Citizens Advice Help to Claim service, which offers free support in the early stages of an application. Call 0800 1448444 or visit www.southgloscab.org.uk

Can I get an emergency payment from the council?

South Gloucestershire Council has some funding from government through the Crisis and Resilience Fund. This is limited so they can only provide emergency payments to low income households in need of immediate or long-term support due to an unexpected change in their financial situation.

A low income does not guarantee you a payment and repeat or duplicate applications are unlikely to be approved.

To apply, you must:

- Live in South Gloucestershire
- Be over 18 years old

You will need to provide:

- Your personal details
- An income and expenditure sheet
- Copies of your bank statements

How to apply:

- Visit www.southglos.gov.uk/crisis-and-resilience-fund
- Visit a One Stop Shop in Kingswood, Patchway or Yate
- Call freephone 0800 953 7778

Is there any other support available?

South Gloucestershire Council and partner organisations can offer lots of support if you are struggling. As well as through financial help with housing costs and council tax reduction, they can also provide advice and guidance on things like debt problems, budgeting advice, energy usage, seasonal help to keep warm in winter and cool in

summer and low cost activities and places to go particularly with children. There is also plenty of support with food and making sure you have enough to eat.

To find out what support you may be entitled to, visit our cost of living hub www.southglos.gov.uk/costofliving

What help is available this summer?

The council has launched its Summer, Sorted! campaign which provides free advice and information about free or low cost places to go, things to do and tips and ideas to entertain children during the school summer holidays. The cost of living team has been attending lots of pop ups at schools during the summer term but if you missed them, they will at a shopping centre near you during the holidays. As well as lots of information and advice, they will have freebies, fun activities and a chance to talk to other organisations about things like stopping smoking and getting back into work.

The campaign is in collaboration with Mamas Bristol, who support families with costs, s wellbeing and social contact www.mamasbristol.com

Find out more including the dates of our summer roadshows at www.southglos.gov.uk/seasonal-support