

Local Welfare Support Scheme

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1.0 Introduction

1.1 From April 2013 the government is abolishing the Community Care Grants and the Crisis Loans for Living Expenses elements from the national discretionary Social Fund. It considered them to be expensive, ineffective and outdated. As a result Local Authorities will receive a settlement for 2013/14 and 2014/15 to create and support local welfare provision. This settlement is not ring fenced. Future funding will be subject to the next Comprehensive Spending Review.

1.2 The settlement for Leeds has been confirmed for 2013/14 and indicative figures have been supplied for 2014/15:

2013/14

Scheme Funding	£2,886,082
Administration Funding	£609,851
Set Up Funding	£28,861

2014/15

Scheme Funding	£2,886,082
Administration Funding	£558,994

From 2015 onwards the scheme is solely funded by Leeds City Council and will be reviewed yearly.

1.3 The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) view is that the new local welfare provision should not be a replication or a new version of the discretionary Social Fund. It considers that it is for Local Authorities to deliver support to their community which best meets its needs through their local welfare services.

2.0 Purpose

2.1 The purpose of this policy is to specify how Leeds City Council will operate the Local Welfare Support Scheme (LWSS) and to outline the factors that will be considered when deciding if a LWSS payment can be awarded.

2.2 Although there is no intention in the long term to recreate the national discretionary Social Fund at a local level it is recognized that expectation will continue to remain in the community after the abolition of Community Care Grants and Crisis Loans for living expenses. Therefore in Leeds we intend to provide support for basic household goods, clothing, curtains and certain travel costs and removal costs. It is also

intended to meet the need arising from a crisis or disaster in the form of emergency provision. This will be operated by the Revenues and Benefits Service.

- 2.3 The scheme will seek to assist vulnerable people in meeting their needs for subsistence or financial support where they are unable to meet their immediate short term needs or where they require assistance to move into or maintain their independence within the community
- 2.4 However, the intention is also to start to develop local, community based and sustainable welfare schemes within Leeds. This will mean the need for financial support from the settlement for initiatives for advice capacity in order for vulnerable people in Leeds to obtain advice and support from the most appropriate services. These competing demands will shape the future development of the LWSS. Therefore the system that will operate from April 3rd will be subject to a thorough review following three months after its introduction.
- 2.5 The development of the LWSS will be aligned to the Council's key principles of tackling inequality and deprivation, promote social cohesion across all communities in Leeds including support for vulnerable older people and the safeguarding of children. This will be achieved by giving due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations.

3.0 Eligibility

Priority Groups (1)

- 3.1 The Local Welfare Support Scheme is to help the most vulnerable people in Leeds. People who are perceived to be vulnerable include the following:
 - Families or vulnerable people under exceptional pressure
 - Homeless people or rough sleepers
 - Vulnerable older people
 - People fleeing domestic violence
 - Young people leaving care or living independently
 - People moving out of institutional or residential care into the community
 - Ex- offenders leaving prison or detention centres
 - People with disabilities

This list is not exhaustive and provision is subject to the availability of funding.

'Exceptional' means something greater than the normal range of pressures experienced by most people.

Priority Groups (2)

3.2 There will be some supported applications which will automatically be accepted as a priority. These cases of vulnerable people will be deemed to have the highest priority to receive support from the Local Welfare Support Scheme.

Housing Options: Homeless people who have obtained a tenancy.

Mental Health/Learning Disability Housing Support Workers: People with mental health problems or a learning disability who are moving into independent living.

Families First: Families under exceptional pressure and where children are at risk.

Leeds City Council Domestic Violence Team: People fleeing domestic violence.

Income and Savings:

3.3 Eligibility criteria for support under the Local Welfare Support Scheme for the provision of basic household goods and for emergency provision will be linked to a low income threshold. This will in the first instance be based on receipt of certain benefits. This may be waived if application for emergency provision is due to a disaster.

Where these benefits are not in payment an additional assessment may need to be made to take into account an individual's financial circumstances. This could be where the applicant is in employment or is homeless and not receiving any of the benefits listed below. The benefits are:

- Income support
- Income based Jobseekers Allowance
- Income based Employment and Support Allowance
- Pension Credit
- Housing Benefit
- Council Tax Support
- Low income of less than £10,000

Receipt of these benefits is no guarantee of a successful application.

- 3.4 Any award for basic household and other household items will be reduced by any savings in excess of £750.
- 3.5 An application for emergency provision will not be accepted where there is access on application to other income or savings to meet the needs arising from the emergency.

Basic Household Goods

- 3.6 Local Welfare Support Scheme is part of a menu of support that applies to the locality. It should not be seen as the sole means of meeting basic needs and people are expected to apply to other agencies such as Jobcentre Plus or charities for support. Therefore help from the Local Welfare Support Scheme will be limited.

Basic household goods are limited to:

- Cooker
- Fridge
- Washing Machine
- Bed
- Bedding
- Flooring
- Clothing on the grounds of the effects of disability
- Removal costs where it is linked to the Homelessness Prevention Fund and approved by the Homeless Support Team/Housing Options
- Travels costs on the grounds that it is linked to avoiding domestic violence or in the welfare of children
- Curtains in cases of a move due to domestic violence and in certain mental health cases.

The provision itself will subject to the availability of funding. The applicant may have to prioritize between items.

Emergency Provision

- 3.7 Customers needing assistance with Emergency Provision:
These include people who:
 - Have no essential food to sustain basic living
 - Need essential goods associated with infants/children
 - Have suffered a major upheaval or disaster

3.8 People are expected to seek support from families and friends before they apply for help with emergency provision. Qualification for Emergency Provision will be dependent on the priority of the application.

3.9 Emergency provision from the Local Welfare Support Scheme may include:

- Food
- Baby provisions
- Items resulting from loss due to a disaster

It is expected that applicants will receive only one award from the Local Welfare Support Scheme. The Scheme would not be sustainable as a repeated or regular supplement to personal incomes.

4.0 Applications and Assessments

4.1 To be eligible to apply for an award under LWSS the applicant needs to be:

- A resident of Leeds.
- At least aged 16.
- Not be a person subject to immigration control who has no recourse to public funds.

4.2 An application for an award under LWSS should be made on line or by telephone. A supported application would be encouraged in order to shorten processing times and enable applicant to receive additional relevant advice. Applicants are therefore encouraged to use existing sources of support within the council and within the community. These include;

- Adult Social Care and Childrens Services
- Families First
- Domestic Violence Team
- Probation Service
- Housing Options
- Housing Leeds and HA Housing Officers
- Advice Leeds agencies

4.3 Calls will be taken by Customer Services staff on a designated local telephone number. Applications will be screened in order to reject inappropriate applications.

4.4 The final assessments and decision-making will be undertaken by Leeds Revenues and Benefit Service. Applications for emergency provision will

be prioritized with service standards in place for quick and accurate decision making, payment of awards and review processes

5.0 Method of Payment

5.1 The Local Welfare Support Scheme will not make payments in cash. Awards may be made by the following methods:

- Standard food parcel/store card for food
- Payments to suppliers of suitable goods or services
- Pre-payment cards for goods
- Goods from local suppliers

5.2 The value of awards for basic household goods will be subject to a maximum. However, higher values may apply for supported applications aimed at tackling or preventing homelessness. Award values will be at the discretion of the Council but will be based on standard prices for items required to include the cost of delivery and installation.

5.3 Subject to availability of funding not all needs may be met and the applicant may need to prioritize the expenditure. As the scheme will be expected to be self-financing regular reviews will monitor the pattern of spending and put a limit on spending where necessary.

6.0 Reviews

6.1 An applicant can ask for the decision to be looked at again if there has been:

- A factual error in the decision making
- An omission or oversight in the decision making
- New evidence since the application which was not put forward at the time.

6.2 The review request will need to be sent/logged within 14 working days of the date of decision.

6.3 The review process will involve a re-assessment by a more senior officer than the original decision maker. Their decision will be final.

6.4 If the applicant remains dissatisfied they will retain the right to make a complaint to the Local Government Ombudsman or seek a Judicial Review.

7.0 Monitoring

- 7.1 The scheme will be closely monitored and will be subject to monthly and quarterly reporting providing data and information on the;
- Number of applications and reasons
 - Number successful/unsuccessful
 - Value of awards
 - Speed of awards and appeals
 - Remaining funding and implications for scheme
- 7.2 The Revenues and Benefit Service will also monitor a number of cases where a request has been refused to ensure decisions are being made fairly and consistently. This is in line with our general equality duties in the exercise of our functions to have due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations.
- 7.3 Where funding is allocated to support community initiatives aimed at tackling financial exclusion, debt, fuel poverty and food poverty, additional reports will be provided in order to detail the effectiveness of the initiatives.