

Wakefield Council - Local Welfare Provision Scheme Policy (Updated April 2020)

To support the most vulnerable residents in the Wakefield district the Council has a Local Welfare Provision Scheme.

The aim of the scheme is to help the most vulnerable residents, it is not a general fund available to all and direct cash payments will not be made.

The scheme is administered by the Financial Welfare Team within the Revenues and Benefits Service.

This policy outlines Wakefield Council's Local Welfare Provision Scheme.

1. Purpose of the Local Welfare Provision Scheme

The scheme will aim to support those most in need who experience an emergency situation or are at the point of crisis and are:

- Unable to meet their immediate basic needs and require assistance as the only way of preventing serious damage or risk to their health and safety and that of their household; or,
- In need of assistance to maintain their independence within the community; or,
- In extreme fuel poverty in that they are unable to afford immediate fuel costs or are in danger of being cut off or disconnected

The policy aims to provide full support, taking into account complementary local provision including:

- Discretionary Housing Payments
- Homelessness prevention
- Section 17 payments under the Children's Act 1989
- Council Tax Support
- Free school meals
- Money management service part of the 'More Money In My Pocket' programme

2. Objectives of the Scheme

The scheme will provide and target assistance to those identified as most in need, this may include:

- Families under exceptional pressure
- Homeless people or rough sleepers
- Vulnerable older people

- People fleeing domestic violence
- Young people leaving care
- People moving out of institutional or residential care
- Ex-offenders leaving prison or detention centres
- Chronically or terminally ill people
- People with alcohol or drug issues
- People with learning difficulties

It will consider assistance in 2 main categories of need:

2.1

Residents who have an immediate need, for example, those who:

- Have no essential food to sustain basic living
- Need essential goods associated with infants/children/personal needs
- Are without or at immediate risk of not having fuel for heating or cooking
- Have suffered a major upheaval or disaster
- Need help towards essential health related costs (where not provided by the NHS or another body)
- Require assistance to cover living expenses / travel costs until they receive their first payment of benefit or salary, where this is not met by the other financial support, benefits or benefit advances from Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)

2.2

Residents who need assistance to establish or maintain a home in the community, for example, those who:

- Have left long term care
- Have left prison
- Have fled domestic violence
- Are moving to supported accommodation/independent living

There may be other situations that need assistance; each application will be considered based on the individual's circumstances and need.

3. Key Principles Underpinning the Scheme

The scheme is administered at the discretion of the Council, however, there are a number of key principles which underpins its delivery:

- This scheme is not intended to replicate or take over the responsibility of statutory agencies;
- Awards will have regard to the allocated fund;

- Awards will normally only be made to those who meet eligibility criteria in accordance with this policy;
- Residents who do not meet eligibility criteria will be signposted to the wider offer of universal services and support available from the third/community and voluntary sector;
- Residents needing other forms of support will be referred to appropriate local agencies with issues such as money management, debt advice, budgeting skills and to health professionals if appropriate.
- Relevant services and local organisations will be engaged to work in partnership to deliver an approach to help avoid repeat applications;
- Each application will be treated on an individual basis and will receive equal and fair treatment and full consideration given to the circumstances, extent, nature and urgency of need;
- As part of Revenues and Benefit Service delivery a proactive approach will be taken to support residents in need; options to identify and target support towards most of those in need may include outreach activities.

4. Assistance provided by the Scheme

Cash will not be provided under the scheme; assistance will include:

- Referrals to food banks if the applicant can to a local food bank
- Food parcel deliveries to those who cannot go to a food bank
- Fuel top-up vouchers for gas and electric; paid via a PayPoint outlet
- Direct payments to suppliers of suitable goods and services
- Services from local partners e.g. financial capability, benefits advice etc.
- Beds & bedding packages
- Essential white goods (including cooker installations)

It will not be a loan scheme and recipients will not be expected to repay the value of any goods provided.

5. Outside the scope of the Scheme

The scheme will not duplicate existing support, payments or awards which are provided by other parts of the Council, other government agencies or third sector organisations. In addition, the scheme will not provide support for needs which are met through benefits administered by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) including but not exclusive to:

- Short Term Benefit Advances,
- Budgeting Loans / Budgeting Advances (for Universal Credit recipients),
- Sure Start Maternity Grants,
- Funeral Payments,

- Cold Weather Payments,
- Winter Fuel Payments, and
- JSA/ESA Hardship Payments. (www.gov.uk/browse/benefits)

6. Eligibility

The Council uses eligibility criteria guidelines to ensure that funds are targeted at the most vulnerable residents and those with the greatest need. They are outlined below:

- Aged over 16 and live in the Wakefield district on a low income and without access to sufficient funds to meet their immediate needs.
- In receipt of (or have claimed, or would be likely to get) either: Income Support, Jobseeker's Allowance, Employment Support Allowance, Guaranteed Pension Credit or Universal Credit.
- Claiming Council Tax Support (CTS) or eligible for CTS at an address in the Wakefield district.
- Require support to stay in the community.
- Without immediate means to meet the basic needs of themselves and / or their dependents.
- Have no savings or capital, including savings in cash, money in banks, saving schemes, premium bonds, stocks, shares and investments in property or land. It is expected that where an applicant has access to savings or capital adequate to meet their needs the application will be refused.

7. Making an application

The scheme will be open to applications from residents, their representatives and trusted referrers who can submit applications on their behalf.

The process will support consistent and fair decision making by gathering supporting information in an accessible and flexible way to avoid undue delay.

Applications will be made mainly by phone and online.

Case management and turnaround service levels will aim to ensure rapid high quality decision making with prioritisation of emergency assistance applications.

Repeat applications will be considered on a case by case basis and assistance for residents repeatedly applying to the scheme may be conditional on compliance with referral arrangements to additional and appropriate support.

8. Data Sharing

Any use of personal data will be in full accordance with the Data Protection Act 2018 and the General Data Protection Regulation 2018.

9. Timescales

The Financial Welfare Team operates during the working hours of 8.30am to 5pm, Monday to Friday. Residents may apply for assistance outside of these working hours; however the application will not be processed until the earliest possible time during working hours. Outside working hours enquiries can be taken by the Council's contact centre.

The aim is to deal with applications within the following timescales:

- For fuel and food – within 1 working day of receiving the application
- For essential white goods / beds – within 5 working days of receiving the application

10. Notification

Once a decision has been made on whether an application has been successful or not, the applicant will be advised in writing of the outcome and reasons for the decision.

If successful details of the award and how it will be made will be provided.

11. Reconsideration procedure

There is no right to a reconsideration; however residents (or their representative) who apply for help and whose application has not been successful may ask for the decision to be reviewed.

A request must be received within 28 days of the original application decision date. The decision will be looked at again by an officer who was not involved in making the original decision.

12. Fraud

The scheme will seek to maximise the funding available for those most in need by deterring fraudulent applications and false statements with appropriate controls enabling prompt action where required.

13. Policy Review

The policy will be reviewed in the light of any budget changes, legislative changes; trends or other factors that impact on the effectiveness of the policy.

14. Financial Constraints and Controls

The Council provides funding for the scheme each new financial year. Regular monitoring of spend on assistance against budget will be in place.

Financial management and monitoring of the scheme will be subject to monthly and quarterly reporting.

The level of assistance provided will be reviewed on the basis of available funds and projected spend and may be adjusted if required.

The scheme will use management systems and software providing detailed and robust management information to allow continuous monitoring of:

- Spend
- Number of applications received
- Number of applicants assisted
- Types of assistance provided
- Reasons for assistance
- Turn round of applications and repeat applications
- Projected allocation of funds