

Local Welfare Support Administration Framework

2019/20



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Purpose

The purpose of this administration framework is to specify how Hartlepool Borough Council operates the Local Welfare Support Scheme (LWSS) and outlines the framework within which award determinations are made.

Each case is treated strictly on its merits and all applicants receive equal and fair treatment. This framework sets out a transparent process taking full account of the Council's responsibilities under all relevant government legislation.

It is open to applicants that live in Hartlepool and/ or to those who have moved to Hartlepool due to a local connection. Applicants must meet the relevant qualifying criteria as specified in this policy. Applicants must be able to demonstrate that they are entitled to 'public funds'.

The fund is administered by the Welfare Support team within The Children's Hub. It is a finite fund and every effort is made to ensure it is available throughout the financial year.

Award types – 'in crisis' and 'non crisis'

There are two strands to the LWSS:

- 'In crisis' awards for those who present to the Council in immediate crisis – awards are for daily living and include food and fuel support;
- 'Non crisis' awards for those who are residents of Hartlepool, not in immediate crisis but need help – awards are for household goods to help set up a home.

Award reasons/ criteria – 'exceptional pressure'

LWSS awards are made to support those facing exceptional pressure. Some examples of situations that may give rise to exceptional pressure are:

- The family suffers an income and cash flow crisis (eg the main person in the family that receives benefits dies or moves out or is taken into prison or is benefit sanctioned;
- Someone in the family suffers from a disability or chronic illness which gives rise to an exceptional need;

- There is, or has been, a breakdown of relationships within the family (eg a relationships ends, couple separate due to domestic violence) and a change in benefit income ensues;
- There is a serious problem with the accommodation (eg overcrowding /structural problems);
- Domestic upheaval because of unforeseen circumstances such as house fire, flooding or other disaster.

The above is not an exhaustive list and officers needs to work within the parameters of 'exceptional pressure'.

What causes exceptional pressure can cover a very wide range of personal circumstances. When considering applications, assessors will look at all the factors causing pressures on the family and will decide:

- Whether any of them individually or collectively when looked at as a whole, constitute exceptional pressure, and;
- If so, whether the items applied for will ease that exceptional pressure.

LWSS payments will also enable the Council to provide support for vulnerable people in financial crisis. The Welfare Support team will treat all applications on an individual basis. When making a decision on any application, consideration will be given to the following priorities:

- Safeguard Hartlepool residents in their homes
- Help those who are trying to help themselves
- Keep families together
- Help provide stability to children
- Support the vulnerable in the local community
- Help applicants through personal crisis and difficult events.

Unless there are exceptional circumstances applications from single people living with other family members will not be awarded as they are likely to have access to support from other family members.

Where a professional is involved with the person (eg Social Worker, Family Support Worker, Mental Health Worker) the Welfare Support team will liaise with them to ensure an appropriate decision on an award is made.

When LWSS applications will not be awarded

In crisis awards will **not** be provided for the following:

- A need which occurs outside the United Kingdom
- Any expense which the Council has a statutory duty to meet
- Travelling expenses to or from school
- Expenses in connection with Court (legal) proceedings such as legal fees, Court fees, fines, costs, damages
- Subsistence or travelling expenses (other than emergency travelling expenses when stranded away from home)
- The cost of domestic assistance and respite care
- Any repair to property owned by public sector housing bodies including housing associations, housing co-operatives and housing trusts
- Repairs or replacement of broken items (exceptions may apply)
- A medical, surgical, optical, or dental item or service (these needs can be provided free of charge to those on a low income by the NHS)
- Work related expenses including fares when seeking work and the cost of work clothes (help is available from other sources)
- Debts to Government Departments
- Investments
- Purchase, installation, rental and call charges for a telephone
- Mobility needs
- Holidays
- A television, radio, TV licence, aerial or rental charges for a television or radio
- Garaging, parking, purchase and running costs of any motor vehicle
- Council tax
- Water charges
- Applicants who have No Recourse to Public Funds in the United Kingdom as determined by the Home Office
- Where DWP payment is available.

‘In Crisis’ – awards for daily living

Historically the LWSS has been in place to provide awards to support people in ‘crisis’. This includes situations where there is a severe risk to the health and safety of the applicant or dependent which cannot be dealt with via other support mechanisms. A crisis could also be an event of great or sudden misfortune such as major flooding, gas explosion or a house fire but it is not expected that a minor mishap or damage or failure of a household item would be deemed a crisis in most circumstances. Awards for daily living include (but are not limited to) food vouchers and energy top ups. Cash is not provided (unless there are operational issues that necessitate this).

Increasingly those that present in crisis for LWSS are suffering ongoing financial hardship and are struggling to make ends meet. This includes individuals and families that are either working but not earning enough to make ends meet, people in receipt of benefits but unable to manage and/ or people not in receipt of any financial support at all (e.g. sanctioned).

Forms of support

Awards will be made for the provision of:

- Food and essential toiletries (via a voucher/prepaid card/ emergency goods parcel)
- Essential clothing and nappies (via a voucher/prepaid card/ emergency goods parcel)
- Heating (via payment to a pre-payment meter to the person/s named on the tenancy agreement)
- Reconnection (via a payment direct to the supplier)
- Travel where no reimbursement is available from any other source; the most cost effective travel option will be identified
- Other forms of support in exceptional circumstances.

Hartlepool Foodbank and Food Poverty

The Trussell Trust and Hartlepool Churches Together operate a foodbank from Church Street two days a week. The Welfare Support team refers appropriate people to the foodbank and is currently the largest referrer in the town. On average some 50+ referrals are made a week by the team for vulnerable single people and families with dependents.

When someone contacts the team in a food crisis a discussion takes place to determine if a foodbank referral is appropriate. Given LWSS reliance on the

foodbank, funding is offered from the LWSS budget to the Hartlepool FoodBank each year to support a contribution to the cost of such referrals.

The Welfare Support team has access to information which clearly explains the location of other free food opportunities throughout the week and directs service users to these where appropriate.

Claiming an 'in crisis' award

Applications for an 'in crisis' award will normally be by telephone or drop in to the Civic Centre. A telephone line is available during normal office hours. The Welfare Support team relies on the availability of the cash office to provide service users with payments and for this reason welfare support opening hours are as follows:

Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday: 9am to 1pm / 2pm to 4pm

Thursday: 10am to 1pm / 2pm to 4pm

Friday: 9am to 1pm / 2pm to 3.30pm

Usually an officer will complete an 'in crisis' application over the phone confirming if the applicant is eligible and if so, the amount to be awarded. If successful, the applicant will be able to collect the relevant crisis award from the cash office at the Civic Centre, Victoria Road, Hartlepool TS24 8AY as soon as is reasonably practicable. Wherever possible this will be on the same day. Applicants must collect their own award and provide identification. Exceptions apply and are at the discretion of a Senior Officer.

Sometimes an officer requires more information to clarify and validate any potential award. The applicant will be offered an appointment, arranged as soon as is reasonably practicable, giving due consideration to the reason for the application.

Where an applicant cannot visit the Civic Centre due to health/mobility issues and cannot use a telephone and has no one else who can act on their behalf an officer may make arrangements to visit the applicant in their home and for the award to be taken to their home.

The Welfare Support team will also consider crisis applications submitted by key service providers and professionals who act on behalf of individuals. Such applications are to be made with the individual's explicit consent. Providers may include Social Workers, Mental Health Workers, The Women's Refuge, Homeless Hostels and Independent Living providers. The team will take into

consideration any information provided by key service providers in support of applications.

Award values

Allowances available are as follows –

| Personal Allowance: Spring/Summer* | Gas | Electric | Food & Toiletries |
|---|------------|-----------------|------------------------------|
| Single person | £10-15 | £10-15 | £5-25 |
| Couple | £10-20 | £10-20 | £10-30 |
| Couple with 1 child | + £7 | + £7 | + £10 |
| Couple with 2 children | + £7 | + £7 | + £10 |
| Couple with 3 children or more | + £7 | + £7 | + £10 |
| Baby Essentials Under 2 Yrs | + £7 | + £7 | + £20 |

* Depending on weather conditions

| Personal Allowance: Autumn/Winter* | Gas | Electric | Food & Toiletries |
|---|------------|-----------------|------------------------------|
| Single person | £20-25 | £20-25 | £10-30 |
| Couple | £20-30 | £20-30 | £10-30 |
| Couple with 1 child | +£10 | +£10 | + £10 |
| Couple with 2 children | +£10 | +£10 | + £10 |
| Couple with 3 children or more | +£10 | +£10 | + £10 |
| Baby Essentials Under 2 Yrs | + £7 | + £7 | + £20 |

* Depending on weather conditions

The period of an award will be considered dependant on an applicants' individual financial status. Awards may be one off or 'split' to vary in time and length depending on the benefit they have applied for/ are receiving. In general, applicants will receive an award relevant to the individual crisis and no more than three awards will be made in six months. The applicant must show genuine

crisis. Those suffering ongoing financial hardship cannot be supported by the LWSS and therefore the Welfare Support team will work with the applicant to access money management, debt and benefit advice from an appropriate agency. In addition, the team will ensure that the applicant is directed to the voluntary and community sector for free food, clothing and other essentials.

Awarding a payment

'In crisis' – awards for daily living

The officer will consider the full circumstances before deciding whether or not to award LWSS. In deciding whether to award LWSS, the officer will take into account the following as applicable to the application:

- The exceptional nature of the applicant and their circumstances
- The financial and medical circumstances of the applicant and their household, if they are relevant to the LWSS request
- The income and essential expenditure of the applicant and their household; all relevant income will be taken into account
- Any savings and investments held by the applicant and their household, which could be used to help their financial situation
- Whether other family members external to the household help in any way
- Whether the applicant and their household are entitled to other welfare benefits but are not claiming them
- Any steps taken by the applicant to improve their circumstances
- Financial advice they have sought to alleviate their situation, such as from Citizens Advice Bureau or West View Advice and Resource Centre.

The officer will record the reasons why a decision to award or refuse an application has been made.

‘Non Crisis’ – awards criteria for household goods

Applicants can request a ‘non crisis’ award if they are receiving a relevant out of work or sickness benefit and/ or relevant elements of Universal Credit. In some circumstances an applicant may be working but able to demonstrate that they have no income with which to pay for the required goods/ services themselves. It is expected that an applicant would apply no more than once in a two year period for a ‘non award’.

Applicants requesting a ‘non crisis’ LWSS award include –

- People that are leaving accommodation in which they have received significant and substantial care and supervision and expect to be discharged imminently
- People who do not have a current tenancy but need to find somewhere to live in the community

Such applicants would usually be expected to receive an out of work or sickness related benefit and/ or a relevant element of Universal Credit.

Examples that would fit this criteria are:

- Homeless people that are supported into a tenancy
- Adults forced to move out of their home without their possessions (eg due to relationship breakdown, domestic abuse)
- Offenders moving out of prison or a detention centre
- Adults coming out of hospital or other medical establishment
- Adults coming out of a care home, a hostel, staff intensive sheltered housing or supported living accommodation
- Young people leaving local authority care.

Forms of support

Requests for support in the purchase of household goods can include -

- Beds and bedding
- Cooking utensils, basic kitchen equipment
- Microwave
- Chair/seating
- White goods – cooker, fridge freezer, washing machine and the connection thereof
- Carpets

- Exceptional requests for alternative items can be considered.

In addition service users may be offered the opportunity to purchase second hand items from charity organisations such as The British Heart Foundation Store. Stores such as the British Heart Foundation support Crisis Schemes for Local Authorities throughout the country and offer a low cost alternative to essential household items. Such items will be clean, in new/ nearly new condition and include a guarantee. This may allow an award made to a service user to be 'stretched' in order for them to acquire more items than if they chose new.

Award values

Award values will be at the discretion of the Council but will be based on standard prices for items required including the cost of delivery and installation.

It is expected that typically an award value will not exceed £650. There may be exceptions when a higher award needs to be made. Such exceptions will be agreed by a Senior Officer and usually be accompanied by a supporting statement from a professional working with the person/ family (e.g. Social Worker).

Claiming a 'non crisis' award

- Applicant completes and submits an up to date LWSS application form
- Officer reviews application
 - If the application is fully complete the officer will aim to write to the applicant within 14 days with a decision
 - If the application is incomplete the officer will contact the applicant for further information. Once all relevant information has been collected the team will contact the applicant with a decision by post
 - If successful, awards will be provided in line with the applicants needs.

A letter will be sent within 2 working days of the decision date, to explain the decision to both successful and unsuccessful applicants together with the reconsideration process where appropriate.

General

The Welfare Support team may request any reasonable evidence in support of an application for a LWSS award. This may include for example, evidence of a tenancy, income/ expenditure information.

The applicant will be asked to provide the evidence as soon as possible so that timely decisions can be made. The team reserves the right to verify any information or evidence provided by the applicant in appropriate circumstances.

Any such action will be essential to the decision making process and will only be used in connection with the LWSS application.

The team reserves the right to close applications where evidence available to the applicant has been requested and not supplied.

The team will seek to maximise the applicant's income by checking the availability of benefits and other sources of financial assistance that they may be eligible for.

The team will offer support to those most vulnerable. This may include the offer of early intervention, referral for social care assessment (adult or children's), referral to other agencies including the voluntary sector for appropriate services. All will be undertaken with explicit consent.

Method of Payment

The Welfare Support team will decide the most appropriate person to pay based upon the circumstances of each case. Depending on individual circumstances, awards may be payable to:

- The applicant
- Their partner
- An appointee
- Any third party to whom it might be most appropriate to make payment i.e. directly to the supplier of goods or services.

The award will usually take the form of a voucher or pre paid card.

Notification

Wherever practicable, the Welfare Support team will aim to inform the applicant in writing of the outcome of their 'in crisis' award application within 24 hours, and within 14 days of receipt of a 'non crisis' application.

Where the application is unsuccessful, the team will set out the reasons why this decision was made and explain how to ask for a review.

Review

An applicant (or their appointee) who disagrees with a LWSS decision may challenge the decision. A request for a review of a 'non crisis' application should be made in writing to the Council within one calendar month of the written LWSS decision being issued to the applicant. A request for review for 'in crisis' applications should be made in writing within two days of the written decision being issued to the applicant.

When a request is made the Council will conduct a review of the decision and contact the applicant within one month of the review request being received. All reviews will be considered by a Senior Officer not involved in the original decision. The outcome of this review will be notified in writing to the applicant and/or the person submitting the review request.

Monitoring arrangements and managing Local Welfare Support

The Welfare Support team will undertake careful monitoring of the number, amount and period of LWSS awards in relation to the available LWSS budget. The purpose is to ensure the LWSS has sufficient funds to meet demands on the LWSS budget throughout the financial year and to support informed profiling of future year's budgets.

The team will also monitor cases where a LWSS request has been refused to ensure decisions are being made fairly and consistently. The Council is subject to the general equality duty. This means that steps will be taken to monitor implementation of this policy to ensure no one is subject to disproportionate adverse treatment. The Council will fully comply with general equality duties.

Publicity

The Welfare Support team will work with partner organisations to raise awareness of the scheme. This includes outreach opportunities within local communities to ensure service users are made aware of the scheme.

Fraud

Hartlepool Borough Council is committed to the fight against fraud in all its forms. An applicant who tries to fraudulently claim a LWSS award by falsely declaring their circumstances, providing a false statement or evidence in support of their application, may have committed an offence under the Fraud Act 2006. Where it is alleged or the authority suspects that such a fraud may have been committed, the matter will be investigated and if fraud is found to have occurred, action will be taken including if appropriate criminal proceedings.

