



Exeter City Council

Exeter Local Welfare Support

Guideline Statement

Introduction

As part of the government's wider welfare reforms the Social Fund currently administered by The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) will be abolished. The Devon Local Government Steering Group (DLGSG) agreed on 19 October 2012 that Devon County Council will distribute the funding to district councils. From 1st April 2013 Exeter City Council will administer a scheme of Local Welfare Support via a funding agreement with Devon County Council. There is a specific intention that any local schemes will not replicate the existing arrangement of Community Care Grants and Crisis Loans. This is an interim arrangement for a period of 2 years. Longer term funding will be informed by a review of these interim arrangements, but at present there is no certainty that this funding will continue.

The DLGSG have specified that the Local Welfare Support scheme is intended to help achieve three strategic outcomes:

- Increase self reliance and resilience
- Quick and effective support for those with high priority short term needs
- Help for people to establish themselves in, or remain in, the community

Local Welfare Support aims:

The aims of the Local Welfare Support (LWS) are to:

- Provide immediate support
 - where the applicant or member of their family would be severely disadvantaged if their immediate needs are not met; and
 - the applicant has no available income or savings; and
 - the applicant's needs cannot be met by any other service or funding.
- Provide support to help Exeter residents maintain financial independence in the longer term.

Local Welfare Support principles:

- Payments in cash or via bank transfer will not be made to applicants (including loans)
- Local Welfare Support will only be available to residents within Exeter City Council's boundary
- Applications for support can be made by support organisations or individuals
- Support will be assessed on the basis of the applicant's individual circumstances & need
- Support is not guaranteed in the form of goods for each applicant
- Support may take the form of money management & budgeting advice only

- All applicants will be expected to engage in money management & budgeting advice following assistance from Local Welfare Support to mitigate future need & to protect the fund

Consideration of the budgetary provision

- Funding for the LWS scheme is limited and as such the budgetary position needs to be considered when making an award.
- The fund must not be exhausted before the end of the year.
- Budget spending will be monitored on a regular basis

Types of Assistance that may be provided

Assistance that may be provided under the support scheme includes:

- Essential Items for new accommodation (via Turntable & new or reconditioned if recycled not available)
- Food vouchers
- Emergency utility vouchers
- Emergency travel assistance (via public transport only)
- Replacement essential domestic appliances
- Rent in advance/rent deposits
- Money management & budgeting advice (including licenced debt advice where appropriate)
- Other reasonable assistance related to severe and critical circumstances.

The above list is not exhaustive and consideration will be given on an individual basis.

Repeat Applications

The LWS Scheme is intended to help Exeter residents cope with extreme and severely difficult situations.

Individuals and families are expected to manage their day to day finances and take steps to budget and manage their household income. On-going Support and guidance in this area may be provided under the scheme to help increase self reliance & resilience.

Repeat applications may not be considered where:

- advice has been ignored or not sought as advised
- a previous application was unsuccessful (unless there has been a change in household circumstances)
- the circumstances could have been avoided or were as a result of reckless or deliberate behaviour
- the applicant has not co-operated with the council or other support services to avoid reoccurrence of a situation

The above list is not exhaustive and consideration will be given to repeat applications and circumstances on an individual basis

Where a fraudulent application has been detected the applicant will be refused any further assistance and where appropriate, the council may take further action.

Awards of Local Welfare Support

Exeter City Council will endeavour to bring together a more integrated assessment process when assessing an applicant's need. We will aim to identify and align with existing funds available both within and outside the council to ensure that the right help is given. Other sources of support may be:

- Discretionary Housing payments
- Council Tax Exceptional Hardship
- Council Tax Discounts & Exemptions
- Children Act 1989 (section 17) payments
- Homelessness Prevention Grant
- Other external charity funding & support

When appropriate a customer will be signposted to other, external means of advice or support

Debt Advice and Money Management

Debt advice and money management is an integral part of the scheme and applicants who apply for assistance where debt or poor money management skills have been identified as either the cause or a contributing factor to their circumstances will be required to engage in money advice support.

Scheme Eligibility

Local Welfare Support is intended to help Exeter residents who have low income and no access to other funds.

All applications will be assessed on an individual need

Applicants will be assessed for support under the following criteria:

- The applicant has not received financial assistance from another source for the same current circumstances.

- The applicant is without sufficient resources to meet their immediate short-term needs
- The applicant must not have capital/savings available to them that would cover the amount of award being sought

Local Welfare Support Applications

Applications can be made via a third party support organisation or on an individual basis by:

Telephone: 01392 265808

Email: localsupport@exeter.gov.uk

Visiting our Customer Service Centre –

Paris Street
Exeter
EX1 1JD

Opening times: Monday to Friday 08:30 to 17:00 (Thursday to 19.00)

Details will be taken to complete a pro forma to record applications made & monitor budget spending.

At the time of application the information needed to assess support will be gathered, this could include the completion of an income and expenditure form and an information sharing consent form.

Any reasonable evidence may be requested in support of the application, this could include:

- evidence of identity
- evidence of earnings
- evidence of benefits or tax credits
- bank statements/evidence of savings
- evidence of expenditure
- statements from a support organisation
- other reasonable evidence relating directly to the application for LWS

We may seek verbal confirmation of evidence requirements for applications made through a supporting organisation.

Reference to other data held by ECC may also be made to support the application within data protection protocols.

We will record details and decisions electronically in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1988.

Decisions

We will aim to make a decision on an application for Local Welfare Support following receipt of all the necessary information and evidence within 3 working days.

Decisions will be communicated to the applicant as soon as possible following the decision being made and information will be given to cover:

- confirmation that assistance has been agreed; or
- the reason that assistance cannot be made
- the details of the assistance offered
- signposting information to other services
- the complaints process

How a decision is made

Officers will make the decision based on the information provided by the applicant or supporting organisation, the circumstances and reason leading to the application, and any other information that is applicable.

The officer making the decision will consider and take into account:

- Applicants financial circumstances
- Access to other forms of financial support
- Circumstances and reasons for the claim
- Preventative measures taken by the applicant or partner
- Impact of making or not making of the award
- The budgetary situation of the fund

Reconsiderations and Complaints

Awards of LWS are not subject to a statutory appeals process

Any reconsideration request will be dealt with within 28 days.

Applicants wishing to request a reconsideration must let ECC know the grounds for requesting a reconsideration.

The reconsideration will consist of a review by another officer who will look again at the application and advise the applicant whether the original decision can be changed.

If the applicant feels they have not been dealt with correctly the ECC complaint process will be available to them. Details of the complaints process can be found at: <http://www.exeter.gov.uk/index.aspx?articleid=9261>

Policy Review and continuous improvement

The LWS is a new scheme and limited information is available to accurately forecast demand.

As the scheme does not replicate any existing provision it is likely that changes to this document and the practical application of the scheme will need to be made throughout the year.

The guideline statement will remain a working document and changes will be made as appropriate to ensure that the scheme continues to meet the needs of Exeter residents. A version controlled copy of this guideline document will appear on Exeter's website