

Worcester City Discretionary Welfare Assistance Scheme Guidance Document

1. Introduction and Scheme Aims

- 1.1 In April 2013, the South Worcestershire Discretionary Welfare Assistance Scheme (DWAS) was launched following the abolition of the Social Fund administered by the Department of Work and Pensions. This scheme was operated by Worcester City Council on behalf of Worcester City, Malvern Hills and Wychavon District Councils.
- 1.2 Government funding was allocated for the first two years of the scheme, after which funding from Worcestershire County Council, Worcester City Council, Malvern Hills District Council and Wychavon District Council was allocated to continue the scheme for a further two years.
- 1.3 The South Worcestershire DWAS ended on 31st May 2017, with local schemes being established by each of the South Worcestershire District Councils in its place. The Worcester City DWAS is funded entirely by budget allocated by Worcester City Council. The scheme has a set budget available per financial year and once this budget has been exhausted, no more awards can be made for the remainder of the financial year. It is therefore essential that assistance through the scheme is targeted at households in the greatest need and who have no other source of assistance available to them.
- 1.4 The fund is discretionary and limited and there is no entitlement to an award. Not all eligible applicants will be successful, for example in the event that there is no further funding available for the financial year.
- 1.5 This document sets out the eligibility criteria to be applied when assessing applications for support through the Worcester City Discretionary Welfare Assistance Scheme (DWAS). The scheme will seek to assist vulnerable people where exceptional circumstances have left them unable to meet their immediate short term needs, where they require help to maintain their independence within the community or where assistance is required with re-settlement into the community.
- 1.5 The scheme seeks to treat all applicants fairly and equitably, with full consideration given to their circumstances. Consideration will be given to the nature, extent and urgency of the need in every case where an application for assistance is made.
- 1.6 The scheme will seek to signpost to alternative sources of support or assistance where possible in order to protect the remaining funds for residents in the greatest need.

2. Forms of Support

2.1 There are two forms of assistance available through this scheme and these are assistance with:-

Crisis Living Support to assist with an immediate short term need for assistance with emergency food, gas and electricity, baby consumables and white goods. Support is available for vulnerable households who are experiencing a disaster, crisis or exceptional financial pressure and the health of a member of the household will significantly deteriorate as a direct result.

Re-Settlement Support to assist with white goods to help with re-establishment in the community after a period of unsettled or supported accommodation.

Crisis Living Support

2.2 Assistance can be provided in the form of either:

- Food Voucher:
 - Value dependent on individual circumstances
 - Maximum voucher value £30
- Voucher for gas or electricity
 - £20 value
 - To be used as payment for meter card payments through Paypoint
- White Goods:
 - Fridge for singles & couples, fridge freezer for families
 - Washing machine for families
 - Electric cooker
 - Applications should only be made for white goods which are considered to be essential to the household's well-being and which the referral agency has verified there is a need for (please see verification section for further details)

2.3 Households are eligible for no more than two awards of food or energy vouchers in a rolling 12 month period. For the purposes of a DWAS award, households are members of the same family who live together. Applications from members of the same household will be treated as repeat applications.

2.4 Households are only eligible for one award of white goods under either Crisis Living Support or Re-settlement support for the lifetime of the scheme (this includes awards made under the South Worcestershire Discretionary Welfare Assistance Scheme). For the purposes of a DWAS award, households are members of the same family who live together.

Applications from members of the same household will be treated as ineligible.

- 2.5 The scheme is not able to assist with replacing broken or worn out white goods. In these circumstances, the referrer should assist the applicant to seek alternative assistance such as repair of the item, a budgeting loan from the DWP, referrals to charitable schemes, signposting to suppliers of good quality second hand goods or signposting to appropriate savings schemes, e.g. credit unions.
- 2.6 In exceptional circumstances, discretion may be given to allow a further award to a household who has already been awarded white goods, or to replace broken white goods where failure to do so would result in the applicant having to enter residential care or be at risk of homelessness or extreme financial hardship. Such applications should be supported by a written statement explaining the reasons for the applicant's need arising and why it cannot be met in any other way. All applications will be considered on their own merits, and the nature of the household's individual circumstances, the impact of refusal on their well-being and the availability of other sources of assistance will be taken into account. Any decision on discretionary applications is final and a refusal cannot be appealed.

Re-settlement support

- 2.7 Assistance can be provided in the form of white goods. The type of white goods available is dependent on the applicant's circumstances (see items listed in Crisis Living Support above).
- 2.8 Households are only eligible for one award of white goods under either Crisis Living Support or Re-settlement support for the lifetime of the scheme (this includes awards made under the South Worcestershire Discretionary Welfare Assistance Scheme). For the purposes of a DWAS award, households are members of the same family who live together. Applications from members of the same household will be treated as ineligible.
- 2.9 In exceptional circumstances, discretion may be given to allow a further award to a household who has already been awarded white goods. Applications for further awards should be supported by a written statement explaining the reasons for the further need arising and why it cannot be met in any other way. All applications will be considered on their own merits, and the nature of the household's individual circumstances, the impact of refusal on their well-being and the availability of other sources of assistance will be taken into account. Any decision on discretionary applications is final and a refusal cannot be appealed.

3. Eligibility

- 3.1 In order to ensure that the scheme is able to assist as many vulnerable households as possible, it is necessary to target assistance at the most vulnerable residents or those facing the most acute pressures.
- 3.2 Access to the fund will be via a referral from a support agency. We are unable to accept direct applications from households.

Scheme Eligibility

- 3.3 This section details the eligibility criteria which apply to both applications for **Crisis Living Support** and **Re-settlement Support**
- 3.4 Agencies can apply for assistance if the person or household they are supporting meets the following criteria:
- Is over 16
 - Has been resident in Worcester City for at least 6 months or has a strong connection to Worcester City if they are homeless, or have moved to Worcester City after leaving custody or institutional care.
 - Is not subject to immigration control and would not fail a habitual residency test
 - Has no savings or other means of accessing support

 - Is in one of the following priority groups:
 - Households which include dependent children under the age of 16
 - Households which include a pregnant woman
 - Households which include a person with a disability or chronic illness
 - Households which include a person who is receiving support from secondary mental health services
 - Homeless households
 - Households which include a person receiving care or support in the home from the local authority or health service
 - Households which include a person who is considered to be vulnerable due to having suffered violence or domestic abuse

 - Is in receipt of, or is entitled to one of the following income related benefits:
 - Housing Benefit
 - Income Support
 - Income based Job Seekers Allowance (JSA)
 - Income related Employment and Support Allowance (ESA)
 - Guaranteed Pension Credit
 - Working Tax Credit
 - Universal Credit (if you are out of work)

Crisis Living Support Eligibility

3.5 In addition to the scheme eligibility criteria listed above, applicants for **Crisis Living Support** must also be experiencing one of the following issues:

- Experiencing exceptional financial difficulty, e.g. due to being the victim of robbery/burglary, or having significant unexpected expenditure
- Having experienced a disaster or emergency, such as fire, flood, gas explosion, bereavement
- Experiencing homelessness, or the threat of homelessness
- Fleeing violence or domestic abuse

3.6 The **Crisis Living Support** element of the Discretionary Welfare Assistance Scheme is available to meet the unplanned need of a household experiencing crisis and is therefore not able to assist due to minor mishaps or damage, failure of a household item, lost or spent money or inability to access savings or capital, except in exceptional circumstances (see paragraph 2.6)

3.7 For clarity, the DWAS cannot assist in the following circumstances:

- The applicant is able to get help privately, either from their own money, savings or resources, or where family or friends are able to assist them
- Items lost due to burglary or disaster are covered by an insurance policy or are a landlord's responsibility
- The household has received 2 awards of energy or food vouchers in the last 12 months or 1 award of white goods for the duration of the scheme. For the purposes of a DWAS award, households are members of the same family who live together. Applications from members of the same household will be treated as ineligible.
- The need could be met through eligibility for any of the following schemes:
 - DWP Short Term Benefit Advance (while awaiting first or increased DWP payment)
 - DWP Budgeting Loan
 - DWP Hardship Payment
 - DWP statutory social fund payments (for example, Winter Fuel Allowance, Sure Start Maternity grants, or Funeral Payments)
 - Requirements under Fair Access to Care services (FACS), for example, statutory duty to provide medical or disability equipment
 - Discretionary Housing Payment

Re-Settlement Support Eligibility Criteria

- 3.8 The Re-settlement Support element of the DWAS is intended to meet the 'planned' need of a vulnerable person coming out of unsettled or supported accommodation which is unfurnished and where the applicant does not already have essential white goods. For example someone:
- Leaving hospital
 - Leaving Prison
 - Leaving institutional or residential care
 - Moving out of temporary accommodation
 - Moving out of refuge accommodation
 - Moving out of hostel or supported accommodation
 - Homeless households or rough sleepers moving into independent accommodation
- 3.9 In order to ensure that assistance is available to those in most need, an application for Re-settlement support should only be made where all other options have been exhausted. For clarity, the DWAS cannot assist in the following circumstances:
- The applicant is able to get help privately, either from their own money, savings or resources, or where family or friends are able to assist them
 - The applicant has white goods available to them but they would prefer new items
 - The household has received 1 award of white goods for the duration of the scheme. For the purposes of a DWAS award, households are members of the same family who live together. Applications from members of the same household will be treated as ineligible.
 - The need could be met through eligibility to any of the following schemes:
 - DWP Short Term Benefit Advance (while awaiting first or increased DWP payment)
 - DWP Budgeting Loan
 - DWP Hardship Payment
 - DWP statutory social fund payments (for example, Winter Fuel Allowance, Sure Start Maternity grants, or Funeral Payments)
 - Requirements under Fair Access to Care services (FACS), for example, statutory duty to provide medical or disability equipment
 - Discretionary Housing Payment
- 3.10 An award for Re-settlement Support will only be considered if the application forms part of a planned re-settlement programme which includes help to set up a new home. Applications can be made prior to the applicant re-settling into a new home, but please note that a delivery address will be required at the time of application.

- 3.11 In order to ensure that applications are appropriate and consistent with the applicant's re-settlement programme, applications for Re-Settlement Support can only be made by the support agency responsible for re-settling the applicant household. For example, this may be Prison or Probation Services, Social Care or Health Professionals, Refuge Support Workers, Supported Accommodation Workers, Housing Associations Officers, Housing Support Workers or Local Authority Housing Officers.

4. APPLICATION PROCESS

- 4.1 Applications for Crisis Living Support and Re-Settlement Support must be made by telephone to the Worcestershire Hub (Hub) by the support agency. Confirmation will be accepted verbally that they are acting on behalf of and have the consent of the applicant.
- 4.2 The referrer will be asked a series of questions to confirm that the applicant is eligible for the scheme and that they meet all the criteria set out within this document. These questions will include: -
- Applicant and other household members' details to include name, address, national insurance number and date of birth.
 - Confirmation that the referrer has had sight of a recent award letter for one of the eligible benefits (no more than 3 months old).
 - Confirmation that the need cannot be met by another source to include friends and family.
 - Confirmation that the applicant does not have own resources or savings
 - Confirmation that the applicant has a local connection - has lived in Worcester City for more than 6 months or has a local connection as a result of special circumstances
 - Confirmation that the client is in one of the eligible priority groups and that failure to provide the requested support would have a negative impact on their health.
 - Details of why the award is required, what crisis the household is experiencing and what makes this application an exceptional circumstance.
- 4.3 The Hub will process the application and inform the referrer of the outcome of their application during the initial telephone call unless further clarification is required.
- 4.4 If unsuccessful, the Council will also provide the client with any relevant welfare advice, or signpost to another agency where possible. The client will also have the right to a second opinion by another relevant officer

(except where a discretionary application is being made e.g. for a further award where the applicant has already received the maximum number of awards).

- 4.5 If successful, the referrer will be advised on the value of the goods (where applicable) and how the goods can be accessed. Goods can be accessed by the following methods: -
- **Emergency food and baby consumables** - The referral will be valid for 7 days for the client to collect vouchers from the Hive. Proof of ID will need to be provided to Hive staff at the point of collection
 - **Gas and electricity** – The referral will be valid for 7 days for the client to collect vouchers from the Hive. Proof of ID will need to be provided to Hive staff at the point of collection. The voucher can then be taken to a Co-operative store with a Paypoint machine and be redeemed for credit on their meter card or key.
 - **White Goods** – A referral will be made to the supplier who will arrange a date directly with the client (or the referrer where required) for goods to be delivered. The supplier will aim to deliver the white goods within 14 days of the referral unless a later date is requested by the applicant. If the applicant is not at home on the pre-arranged date that the goods are delivered, no further delivery attempts will be made and this will be counted as one application, unless there is an exceptional circumstance.
- 4.6 The scheme will operate during normal office hours and this will not include “out of hours” (i.e. weekend and evening) provision.

5. Verification Process

- 5.1 In order to ensure that the DWAS funding available is used to assist those households in the greatest need, it is essential that there is a robust verification process to confirm applicants’ need and eligibility.
- 5.2 One of the key principles of the DWAS is to ensure that assistance can be provided to those in need in a timely manner. In order to achieve this, the application process will not require the submission of proof of applicants’ eligibility. Instead, the scheme will rely on the referring agency ensuring that they are making appropriate referrals for applicants whose individual circumstances and needs are well known to them, meaning that they are able to confirm their eligibility for an award.
- 5.3 In the case of Crisis Living Support applications for food and energy vouchers, we recognise that it is essential that applicants are able to access assistance very quickly and therefore verification of eligibility and need will be undertaken during the telephone application process. The referrer should ensure that they have verified the applicant’s circumstances, need and eligibility prior to commencing the application in

order that the application process can be completed as quickly as possible. Where a referrer is unable to confirm verification of need and eligibility, the application will be refused.

- 5.4 In the case of applications for white goods, the application will be completed by telephone as normal, but further verification will be required before a referral for white goods is made to the supplier. A declaration form will be available for download from the Discretionary Welfare Assistance Scheme pages of the Worcester City Council website. Following the telephone application, both the referrer and applicant must complete and sign this form, confirming eligibility and need, and email it to housing@worchester.gov.uk . Until this form has been received, the application will be considered incomplete. If this declaration form has not been received within 14 days of the telephone application, the application will be considered as withdrawn.
- 5.5 In the case of applications for white goods made under the Crisis Living Support element of the scheme, the referrer must be able to confirm that they have verified the applicant's need for the items requested. In cases where an application is being made by a referrer who has not visited the applicant's home to verify need, they must seek confirmation of need from relevant sources (e.g. applicant's landlord, Housing Officer, other home visiting support Officer) before an application can be made.
- 5.6 Worcester City Council Officers will undertake periodic checks of white goods applications to ensure that declaration forms received from referrers are supported by evidence. Where there is reason to believe that inappropriate referrals have been made without confirmation and verification having been undertaken, the agency will be unable to make further referrals to the scheme until they can demonstrate that robust verification processes have been put in place for the future.

6. REQUESTING A SECOND OPINION

- 6.1 If a telephone application is unsuccessful, the referrer may request that the decision is considered by another relevant officer. Requests for a second opinion must be made in writing, which may include electronic format and shall only be considered if received within 5 working days of a the unsuccessful application.
- 6.2 Requests for a second opinion must set out details of the applicant's circumstances and the reason for requesting a review, and be accompanied by any new supporting information.
- 6.3 A second opinion shall be conducted by an officer other than the officer making the original decision.
- 6.4 The outcome of the second opinion shall be final and there shall be no further right to request a review or to appeal against the decision.

- 6.5 Requests for second opinion shall be conducted in accordance with this guidance document and will not be considered under the Council's Complaints Policy.

APPENDIX B: OTHER PROVISIONS

Discretionary Housing Payment

May be used to pay for:

- rent deposits
- rent in advance
- rent arrears (but not if you were receiving enough housing benefit to pay all of your rent at the time the arrears built up)
- a shortfall between housing benefit and rent
- reductions in housing benefit, after changes in April 2013 known as the 'bedroom tax'
- reductions in local housing allowance resulting from changes from April 2011 (benefit caps).
- Any costs associated with housing eg removals

A discretionary housing payment (DHP) cannot be paid if the reason for shortfall is that your housing benefit has been reduced to recover an overpayment or because other benefits have been reduced, for example, because leaving last job voluntarily.

Hardship payments - DWP

You may be able to get a hardship payment if your JSA or Universal Credit payments have been stopped (sanctioned).

A hardship payment is a reduced amount of your JSA or Universal Credit and is intended to meet the cost of your basic needs. 'Basic needs' include accommodation, heating, food and hygiene. You'll only be eligible if the reason you can't meet these needs is because of the sanction.

Eligibility

You can get a hardship payment if you can't pay for rent, heating, food or other basic needs for you or your child.

You must be 18 or over.

You'll have to show that you've tried to find the money from somewhere else, such as borrowing from a friend or working extra hours.

Short Term Advances - DWP

When someone makes, or is about to make, a new claim to benefit, they can sometimes encounter a period of financial need before receiving their first payment of benefits. Short term advances provide an advance of their future benefit award which will then be recovered from subsequent payments of benefit.

Also available to claimants who have experienced a change of circumstances that will increase the benefits to which they are entitled.

Budgeting Loans – DWP

Budgeting Loans ensure that those with the lowest incomes claiming Universal Credit have access to an interest free alternative to high cost lending for emergency and unforeseen circumstances. They are intended to help claimants defray intermittent expenses such as needing to buy essential household items such as furniture or household equipment, or expenses related to, for example, maternity or starting work.

Households must have been in receipt of the following benefits for 26 weeks or more to be eligible:

- Income Support
- Income-based Job Seekers Allowance
- Income-related Employment and Support Allowance
- Pension Credit
- Universal Credit

Disabled Facilities Grant or disability related expenditure

These grants are mandatory housing grants, and awarded to enable applicants to have access to and around their homes, or to use essential facilities in the home to enable them to live independently. A referral from the Occupational Therapist (OT) via Social Services confirming that the works are 'necessary and appropriate' is required. This referral will specify the works required.

Section 17 payments

refers to exceptional payments made by local authorities to children in need, their families and others to exceptional safeguard and promote the welfare of children within their area who are in need under Section 17 of the Children Act 1989. Before giving assistance, a local authority should have regard to the means of the child concerned and of each of his/her parents and the agreed set of eligibility criteria.

Foodbanks

Vouchers can be issued by care professionals to be redeemed against three days food from Foodbanks in Worcester and Malvern.

Utility Companies – Trust Funds

British Gas & EDF Energy

www.britishgasenergytrust.org.uk

For EDF & British Gas Customers: email: bget@charisgrants.com
EDF Energy Trust, PO Box 42, Peterborough PE3 8XH
Tel: 01733 421060

- Clear domestic gas and electricity debts and other priority household debts, e.g. rent arrears, council tax debts.
- Purchase essential household items, e.g. washing machines, cookers

Provide other forms of financial assistance, e.g. bankruptcy deposits, funeral expenses.

Npower Customers

For Npower Customers: www.npowerenergyfund.com

Apply online or if they prefer to be sent an application form in post tel ephone us on 01733 421 060 or email npef@charisgrants.com stating the name and full address to send the form to the address stated (no stamp required)

- The Fund can help you with debts of domestic gas / electricity charges owed to Npower.

Severn Trent Trust Fund

<http://www.sttf.org.uk>

- Severn Trent Trust Fund can consider making a grant to meet water and/or sewerage charges due to Severn Trent Water if you are in hardship and unable to pay
- The Trust can also help with water or sewerage charges which are collected by other companies or organisations on behalf of Severn Trent Water
- In certain cases, the Trust can also consider giving some help to meet other essential bills, household needs or priority debts