



Local Welfare Support Service Policy

1 April 2020

Contents

Version Control	1
Background	2
Purpose of the Policy	2
Aims of the Policy.....	2
Equalities	2
Administration	3
Defining the Service	3
Support and assistance.....	3
Eligibility Criteria.....	4
About the service	5
Money Advice.....	5
Fuel Poverty	5
Food Parcels	6
Furniture Provision	6
Exclusions	6
Repeat Applications	7
Budgetary Provision	7
Policy Review.....	8

Version Control		
Version	Date	Notes
1	1 March 2019	Draft
2	1 April 2020	Updated following review
3	1 April 2020	Updated to reflect changes under COVID-19

Background

As part of the Welfare Reform Act 2012, the discretionary element of the Social Fund was abolished. This comprised of Crisis Loans and Community Care Grants, which came to an end in April 2013. Local Authorities were asked to make available new provision, using funding previously used to respond to the local demand. No new statutory duty was introduced, and Councils were tasked with making decisions regarding continuation of the Local Welfare Provision Scheme.

Wigan Council agreed to continue to administer the Local Welfare Support Service for the borough with revisions to the eligibility criteria.

Funding is to be administered by the Wigan Council Customer Services Team. This will allow us the opportunity to ensure service provision has:

- alignment with other forms of discretionary support such as Discretionary Housing Payments and the Council Tax Reduction Scheme
- a holistic approach to identifying need and providing appropriate support
- links to wider Public Services Reform work as it develops

Purpose of the Policy

The purpose of this policy is to specify how Wigan Council will administer Wigan Council's Local Welfare Support Service.

All customers will be treated equally and fairly and in accordance with the Council's policies.

Aims of the Policy

The aim of the Local Welfare Support Service is to work across the council and with partners and local organisations to:

- alleviate poverty
- sustain tenancies and prevent homelessness
- safeguard residents in their own homes
- help families stay together
- support young people leaving Local Authority care
- support the vulnerable, including young children and the elderly in the local community
- help customers through personal crises and difficult events
- provide relief from immediate crisis
- provide effective information, advice and signposting for customers in a crisis
- identify the cause of issues that lead to customers to access the service

Equalities

The Council is committed to equality and fairness. Equality is about ensuring people are treated fairly and given fair chances. It is also about ensuring that people receive fair outcomes in the standard of service they receive from the Council and equality of access to services. This incorporates everyone, regardless of their race, gender, age, religion or belief, sexual orientation, marital or civil partnership status or disability in line with the principles set out in the Equalities Act 2010.

Administration

Customer Services administer the Local Welfare Support Policy in line with welfare requirements and community needs. These include, but not exclusively:

- review the policy, procedures and administration of the service
- provide operational procedures
- increase customer self-reliance and resilience
- provide help for people to establish themselves in or, remain in the community
- the provision of an online, face to face and telephony offer
- offer quick and effective support for those with high priority short term needs

Defining the Service

The Local Welfare Support Service aims to deliver a holistic and integrated assessment and support process. This will offer a co-ordinated approach to vulnerable individuals in hardship. There will be a requirement to work closely with key partners to have a clear understanding of routes for alternative advice, help and support to deliver the best outcome for customers and meet their immediate and long-term needs,

The service may meet immediate needs but will support individuals to access further help and support to move from costly crisis interventions to increasingly self-reliant approaches. This will be achieved through referrals to appropriate support organisations and groups.

The Local Welfare Support Service will only be provided where no alternative avenue is available or appropriate.

Initial approaches or access can be made online by visiting www.wigan.gov.uk/localwelfaresupport Wigan and Leigh Life Centres or through the Wigan Council Contact Centre.

Support and assistance

Local Welfare Support will be triaged through online support regardless of the individual customer circumstances and who has referred them. If an individual is entitled to Local Welfare Support they will be referred onto one of our welfare providers for food parcels, gas and electricity, furniture or a combination of support.

At all the following points the advisor will ensure that their advice, information, assistance and support include:

- financial advice involving budgeting, financial education, debt advice, utility switch
- benefit advice, including impact of ongoing and potential future Welfare Reforms
- support to employment or training
- effective signposting to other more appropriate assistance as part of the coordinated and holistic approach of the provision
- effective signposting to other service providers to assist with the wider holistic needs of the individual
- co-working with a range of agencies as required to support customer needs

Eligibility Criteria

To access Local Welfare Support customers will need to meet one or more of the following eligibility criteria:

- be a person 16 years of age or over and living in the Wigan Borough
- lived in the borough of Wigan for at least six weeks prior to applying, except for people:
 - released from prison
 - fleeing domestic or gang violence
 - living in council temporary accommodation or registered care projects
- be without enough resources to meet their immediate short-term needs
- applications from single people living with family members, will only be considered in exceptional circumstances, for example, the family members are unable to assist due to the demands of their own financial, health or general circumstances.

In addition, customers will need to meet the following eligibility criteria to access a Domestic Relief Furniture Package:

- be experiencing a crisis or an emergency
- are being resettled into the community following a period in institutional or residential care, for example leaving prison or supported accommodation
- need support to prevent them from entering institutional or residential care
- have a family under exceptional pressure
- setting up home as part of a planned resettlement

The Local Welfare Support Service will consider the full circumstances before deciding whether to award a Domestic Relief Furniture Package.

If a customer presents at the Local Welfare Support Service and they do not meet the criteria for Domestic Relief Furniture Package they will be sign posted to Trust Fund Applications and local charities.

For referrals from other organisations and partners there is an online contact form which is managed through the Local Welfare Support Service. The referring organisation is expected to carry out an assessment of the customer's needs in line with all eligibility criteria prior to submitting the referral.

Customers will be referred to other relevant council departments and partner organisations where applicable.

Customers will not be eligible for Local Welfare Support if they are:

- deemed to be depriving themselves of income by choosing not to apply for benefits they are entitled
- a Looked After Child being supported by the Local Authority
- applying because they have had their benefit disallowed and have not applied for a hardship payment from the Department for Work and Pensions
- applying because they are subject to a benefit sanction and have not applied for a hardship payment from the Department for Work and Pensions
- subject to a sanction from the Department for Work and Pensions and an award will undermine a sanction
- able to access money or savings that allow them to access the provision for themselves

- resident in a care home or other supported accommodation, unless there are plans for discharge within eight weeks
- a hospital inpatient unless there are plans for discharge within eight weeks
- lawfully detained unless there are plans for release within eight weeks
- a member of a religious order who is being fully maintained by it

or

- have applied for assistance with items for independent living in the last 28 days and there is no significant change in circumstances
- can meet the need from another source, for example, if the Council has a statutory duty to meet an expense such as Disabled Facilities Grant under Section 24(1)(a) of the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996, or under the provisions of Section 17 of the Children Act 1989

About the service

Money Advice

Money management and debt advice is integral to delivering a holistic Local Welfare Support Service to improve outcomes and increase self-reliance and resilience. To support customer opportunities to refer and signpost into partners and organisations may be made, including:

- Citizens Advice Bureau for independent in-depth debt advice, Welfare Rights, Advice, Support and Information including income maximisation, energy switch and money management courses
- online alternatives are also available from national organisations www.stepchange.org, www.nationaldebtline.org or www.citizensadvice.org.uk
- appropriate council officers for advice on Welfare Rights, Advice, Support and Information including income maximisation

Refusal to participate or provide information to assess an individual's current financial situation could result in a refusal of Local Welfare Support and or will be considered as a withdrawal of application.

Fuel Poverty

Where appropriate we will:

- issue crisis heating payments, enabling customers to pay for some short-term emergency heating, after the utility supplier has been contacted to request a credit
- ask the customer to provide an up to date bank statement before a heating payment can be issued where appropriate to do so
- issue a customer a maximum of 2 emergency heating vouchers in any 12 month period, although discretion will be applied to each individual case
- refer to AWARM

Cases will be considered based on individual circumstances. A referral will only be made once the cause of the customer's problem is understood and any identified support referrals have been made that improve long term outcomes for customers.

Food Parcels

We work in partnership with organisations and agencies to provide food parcels for customers and their families who find themselves in crisis and have no means of providing food for themselves.

To reflect the rules of the Trussell Trust Foodbanks we can provide 3 parcel vouchers in any 6-month period to Customers in food crisis. If there are issues with Universal Credit payments, then the number of vouchers may be as many as 6 consecutive food vouchers.

The council will consider each case based on individual circumstances and referrals will only be made once the root cause of the customer's problem is identified and, where necessary, the appropriate referrals to partners and external organisations have been made

Where 2 food parcels have been provided in any 12 month period customers will be referred for money advice to enables appropriate support is be offered. If customers do not engage with referrals future support may not be considered.

We will take sanction circumstances into account when considering whether to support customers and may consult with the Department for Work and Pensions as appropriate and the customer will also be advised to claim a hardship payment where possible.

Furniture Provision

We can, where appropriate, provide essential furniture to people in financial crisis.

The items classed as being essential within the various furniture types are listed below:

Essential furniture	Includes:
Beds and bedding	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• single bed with mattress and bedding• double bed with mattress and bedding• bunk beds with mattresses and bedding <p>This does not include the provision of a cot, customers will be signposted to local charities who will support them with these needs</p>
Seating items	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 2 seat sofa, 3 seat sofa or 3 piece suite• dining table with 2 chairs, dining table with 4 chairs or dining table with 6 chairs
Crockery and cooking utensils	packages consisting of essential pots, pans and cutlery

All furniture issued through this service, whether new or used, must be formulated, designed, constructed, finished and packaged as to be safe and without risk to health.

Furniture items will be provided within 10 days of receiving a referral. The provider will contact the customer and arrange the delivery of the furniture.

Exclusions

The following are examples of circumstances that are excluded from assistance:

- maternity expenses
- funeral expenses
- Cold Weather Payments
- Winter Fuel Payments
- expenses or services that are provided by another organisation or statutory body
- housing costs, repairs or improvements
- work related expenses
- education or training expenses
- legal or court fees, fines, etc.
- non-receipt or loss of benefit payments
- vehicle and travel costs

Crisis Loans for White Goods and Resettlement Packages are no longer available; the Local Welfare Support Service will refer customers to local charities.

We do not provide Local Welfare Support where there are shortfalls in Council Tax Reduction awards or reductions in Housing Benefit entitlement including those associated with the social sector size criteria, Bedroom Tax.

Customers may be able to receive support with these costs via the Council's Council Tax Reduction or Discretionary Housing Payment schemes, support to maximise customer entitlement can be offered through our Welfare Rights, Advice and Support Service.

The above list is not exhaustive, and consideration will be given to individual circumstances on their own merit.

Repeat Applications

The Local Welfare Support Service is intended to help individuals and families to cope with crisis situations to avoid risk to their health, safety and wellbeing.

Individuals are expected to manage their day today finances and take steps to budget and manage their household income. On-going support and guidance in this area may be provided under the service.

Repeat requests for Local Welfare Support may not be considered for:

- the same set of circumstances in the last 6 months
- where advice has been ignored or not sought as advised
- where the individual has not taken steps to remedy the situation
- where the circumstances could have been avoided or were because of reckless or deliberate behaviour
- where the customer has not co-operated with the Council or other public bodies, partners and organisations

The above list is not exhaustive, and consideration and discretion will be given to repeat requests on an individual basis.

Budgetary Provision

Funding for the Local Welfare Support Service is limited and as such the budgetary position needs to be considered when making an award. The referring organisation is expected to carry out an assessment of the customer's needs in line with all eligibility criteria prior to submitting the referral.

The fund must not be exhausted before the end of the year.

If there is substantial demand on the fund only high priority cases will be considered for an award.

Policy Review

The Local Welfare Support Policy will be reviewed annually, or as new national and local policies are required to be considered.

Any changes will be in accordance with best practice to ensure that the service continues to meet the stated outcomes, objectives, needs of the local community and the Council.

The Local Welfare Support Policy will be published and available to view on the Council's website.