



## **South Gloucestershire Welfare Grant Policy.**

Policy Created: 1<sup>st</sup> April 2016

Policy last reviewed: 8th June 2018

### **Purpose of the Scheme**

- 1.1 The revised scheme was introduced on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2016 following the decision of Councillors to award £200,000 per annum inclusive of administration costs to continue with a Welfare Grant scheme. The scheme will remain under the administration of the South Gloucestershire Council's Revenues, Benefits and Welfare Teams. No new legal duties are placed on local authorities to provide support or assistance; therefore the scheme and funding are reviewed annually.
- 1.2 The purpose of this policy is to specify how South Gloucestershire Council operates this scheme and to outline the factors considered when deciding if a grant can be made.
- 1.3 The scheme is aimed at helping the disadvantaged or those that are in immediate crisis to obtain grants to help in the event of unforeseen circumstances or disaster.
- 1.4 The scheme will ensure high quality decision making within agreed service levels.
- 1.5 The policy will treat each applicant fairly and equitably with full consideration given to individual circumstances. Wherever possible, the scheme will seek alternative avenues of funding, which will help protect funds for people most in need.
- 1.6 In each case, consideration will be given to the nature, extent, impact and urgency of the need.
- 1.7 The scheme will meet the needs of the most vulnerable residents, in accordance with the council's equality and child poverty duties.
- 1.8 In addition to receiving applications from applicants and their representatives, the scheme will endeavour to use measures to identify and target support to people most in need. This may be supplemented by targeted campaigns and outreach activities.

### **Targeted Scenarios for Support**

- 2.1 The scheme will identify and support people in South Gloucestershire who are in immediate need of urgent assistance or support. The scheme will consider paying awards under two types of need: to people who require immediate support, and to people who require assistance to establish a home in the community.

2.2 Awards are made on a grant basis and successful applicants will not be required to repay the amount of any grant made to them. However there may be circumstances where a financial award will be reduced, where it is identified that the scheme has been abused.

2.3 People most likely to require immediate assistance may include (this list is not exhaustive):

- Those who have or who are recovering from an alcohol, drug or gambling addiction
- Those under 25 with no other access to support packages.
- Those who are leaving prison
- Those fleeing domestic violence
- Those with severe mental health issues
- Those who are homeless
- Vulnerable older people
- Those who have suffered a major upheaval or disaster that could not have been foreseen

2.4 Awards of immediate assistance **may** be made to help with the provision of:

- Essential food
- Essential goods associated with infants/children, such as such as baby formula and nappies
- Gas and/or electricity

2.5 Assistance to establish a new home in the community may be considered for applicants who, for example (this list is not exhaustive):

- Have left prison
- Have fled domestic violence
- Those under 25 with no other access to support packages.
- Those who have moved from supported accommodation/independent living
- Those who are homeless

2.6 Awards for assistance to establish a home **may** be made to help with the provision of:

- Beds
- White goods (maximum of one per application)
- Essential domestic furniture / beds
- Essential clothing
- Essential bedding
- Essential domestic items e.g. cookware

2.7 Awards would not normally be given for:

- Flooring and Curtains / Redecoration
- Transport Costs / Motor vehicle expenses

- Installation of a telephone, telephone line or mobile phone costs
  - Housing costs or arrears of rent including rent in advance and rental deposits
  - Costs associated with moving home e.g. removals
  - Costs capable of being met by other government support or state benefits including Universal Credit advance and short term benefit advances
  - Debts
  - TV licence / a television or satellite dish cost or repair
  - Where the applicant has access to sufficient income or savings
  - Costs associated with care provision
  - Specialist beds or other specialist equipment
- 2.8 We do not routinely make awards for broken items, but may do so if this is having a detrimental effect on a household.
- 2.9 The scheme will seek to provide a range of support, taking into account alternative local provision including Discretionary Housing Payments, Disability Related Expenditure allowances within social care charging policy, Council Tax Support and Disabled Facilities Grant. The scheme will also seek partnership arrangements with local organisations that can provide assistance such as food banks and furniture re-use centres, and will endeavour to work with local businesses to purchase goods and services which will offer an accessible, value for money service.
- 2.10 An eligible household may only make:
- 1 successful application in a 12 month rolling period where the application is for an award of immediate assistance (under paragraph 2.4 above); and
  - 1 successful application in a 24 month rolling period where the application is for an award for assistance to establish a home (under paragraph 2.6 above).
- 2.11 Applicants with a history of repeat applications may be refused and / or referred to other agencies for advice or support.

## Eligibility

- 3.1 Awards cannot be made to applicants who are subject to immigration control or who have no recourse to public funds.
- 3.2 Applicants who may be eligible to make applications to the South Gloucestershire Welfare Grant scheme are those aged 16 and over who have recourse to public funds and are not subject to immigration control, and who meet the following conditions:
- A South Gloucestershire resident
  - Or
  - Is abandoned or destitute with no friends or family and with no other means of moving on or means of support

And

- Be in receipt of certain benefits\* and under the benefit cap limits (when calculating this Disability Living Allowance, Attendance Allowance and Personal Independence Payment should be included)
- Or
- Be in low paid employment as defined by being on the minimum/living wage or below
- Or
- Not currently be in receipt of any income.

\*The following benefits are those an applicant should currently be in receipt of to meet the eligibility criteria and as individually updated by the Government's welfare reform changes:

Income Support

Job Seekers Allowance

Employment Support Allowance

Universal Credit

Pension Credit

Housing Benefit

Council Tax Reduction

3.3 Consideration will only be given to the application if the above criteria are met and the need is identified as

- Temporary support not provided by any other means

Or

- Be recognised as a personal one off crisis

And

- It is **NOT** the result of civil emergency, state of war **or** other national, civil **or** natural disaster (such as flooding, fire with urgent and life saving need) beyond the borders of South Gloucestershire Council.

An award will only be made to the crisis affected person or family unit, or at the decision maker's discretion, to a suitable nominated third party.

3.4 Under data sharing powers the team administering the scheme will have access to government DWP data in relation to income and savings. This data will be used to determine if an applicant is eligible for an award. Applicants accept the council will check and share data with other council departments and agencies as allowed for in law.

- 3.5 All requests will be assessed on an individual basis with due consideration given to the vulnerability and personal circumstances of each applicant.
- 3.6 In exceptional circumstances applications will be considered from those individuals who do not meet the eligibility criteria of 3.2.

## The Application Process

- 4.1 The application process will be clear, transparent and accessible, allowing applicants to request support through a number of methods predominantly by telephone and online. Alternative forms of application will be considered in exceptional circumstances to ensure all applicants have full access to the scheme.
- 4.2 Applications will be considered from applicants, their appointees or their representatives. Referrals may also be received from local authority services and external organisations such as the Probation Service, hostels, advice agencies and other charitable organisations.
- 4.3 The application process and turnaround times will be structured to ensure efficient high quality decision making. Applications for immediate assistance will be prioritised, with agreed timescales for the decision making and the payment of awards. We aim to make a decision within 2 working days for immediate crisis applications and within 5 working days for non-emergency household applications.
- 4.4 There is no provision for an out of hours' service.
- 4.5 Applicants may be required to provide documentation to support their application before an award can be made. This may include evidence such as crime reference numbers, benefit award letters, bank statements or tenancy agreements.
- 4.6 An application is deemed to have lapsed if requested supporting documentation or information has not been supplied within 7 calendar days for immediate crisis applications or 14 calendar days for non-emergency household applications.

## Methods of Payment

- 5.1 The council will decide on the methods of payment for each award. The methods of payment currently available under the scheme, include
- Supermarket vouchers to purchase food
  - Prepaid cards
  - Goods from local suppliers
- 5.2 Cash payments will **not** be awarded under any circumstances.

## Award

- 6.1 If your application is successful then you will be required to validate your award within 3 working days where your award is for immediate assistance (under paragraph 2.4 above) and within 10 working days where your award is for assistance to establish a home (under paragraph 2.6. above)

In order to validate an award, the applicant must attend a Council One Stop Shop site (Kingswood, Patchway or Yate) and provide the following evidence before they are able to receive the award:

- Identification (e.g. passport, driving licence)
  - Proof that they are a resident of South Gloucestershire (e.g. recent Utility bill, Council Tax bill)
  - Proof of their income (e.g. Bank statements, pay slip, benefit award letter)
- 6.2 In the event that an award is not validated within the relevant time period detailed in paragraph 6.1 above, the award will be cancelled.
- 6.3 In the event that a prepaid card is not spent with 4 weeks of validation, any remaining balance will be returned to the scheme so that the funds can be redistributed to future applicants, as an award of this nature is deemed to be urgent and is expected to be spent within a short period of time.
- 6.4. In the event that our suppliers are unable to deliver goods within 4 weeks of validation due the applicant's actions, these items will be cancelled. The funding attributed to these goods will be returned to the scheme, as an award of this nature is expected to be delivered within the prescribed timescale.

## Misuse or Fraud

- 7.1 The scheme may determine that it is appropriate for some or all of your award to be issued on a prepaid card. In the event that you are issued with a prepaid card under the scheme and you spend this on items other than that for which it was awarded, or otherwise misuse the card, this element of your award will be cancelled and you may be prohibited from making any future application under the scheme.
- 7.2 Examples of the misuse of a prepaid card would include those items listed in the Appendix at the end of this policy.

## Rights of Appeal

- 8.1 The applicant or their authorised representative will have the right to request that the decision be reviewed and may do this by email or by attending a Council One Stop Shop site to lodge their appeal.

8.2 Reasons for appealing a decision could include:

- A welfare Grant application has been refused
- The applicant is dissatisfied with the payment method or to whom it has been awarded
- The applicant is dissatisfied with the amount of award
- The applicant does not consider that their award should have been cancelled under paragraph 6 (Award) or 7 (Misuse or Fraud) above.

8.3 Under the scheme there is a structured process that enables applicants to appeal where they are dissatisfied with a decision. As part of this process, applicants may be required to provide us with further evidence and/or information to support their appeal.

8.4 The appeal has two stages:

Stage 1: An applicant must make a written or verbal appeal within seven calendar days of the original decision. The appeal should clearly state why the original decision is unfair or incorrect. The appeal will be reviewed by a Senior Officer within 14 calendar days of receipt.

Stage 2: An applicant must make a written appeal within seven calendar days of the Stage 1 appeal decision. The appeal should clearly state why the original decision is unfair or incorrect. The Stage 2 appeal will be dealt with by the Council's Discretionary Appeals Panel (DAP). The DAP decision will be determined within 21 calendar days.

There is no further right of appeal beyond Stage 2.

We do not reimburse any costs associated with an appeal.

## Financial Constraints and Controls

- 9.1 South Gloucestershire Council's funding arrangements will be cash limited having taken into account historic data available on past social fund payments.
- 9.2 The Council, as part of its budget setting, approves an annual budget to fund welfare grants. Any underspend on these monies at the end of the financial year is returned to Council balances for reallocation.
- 9.3 Noting that annual funding is finite; regular monitoring of the scheme will be undertaken. In the event of a local emergency (for example flood or fire) affecting several households, the council reserves the right to review funds.
- 9.4 Financial management will be undertaken on a monthly basis and normal council financial reporting requirements will be met, with awards being decided in light of resources and the options available.
- 9.5 Funds will be allocated on a monthly basis and if the limit has been reached for a given monthly period then no further awards will be made during that period.

9.6 An efficient and effective solution will be implemented which provides detailed and robust management information to allow continuous monitoring and real time information in relation to:

- methods of payment
- projected allocation of funds
- awards made
- equalities data
- speed of awards and appeals

9.7 The policy will aim to deter fraudulent claims and false statements ensuring appropriate controls are in place and swift action is taken where necessary. Consideration will also be given to reducing the potential for duplicate applications within neighbouring authorities. The service will liaise with internal and external organisations as appropriate, in order to minimise fraud. Such measures will in turn maximise the limited funding available for those most in need.

## Policy Review

10 This policy is reviewed on an annual basis.

## Appendix

Examples of items that a prepaid card cannot be used for include;

- Cashback or ATM withdrawals
- Exchanging any unspent card balance for cash
- To purchase entertainment goods such as TV's, computers, music systems or any entertainment services
- Non-essential items
- Cigarettes or alcohol,
- Lottery tickets
- To cover rent arrears
- Vehicle repairs
- Travel