



Local Welfare Provision Policy

Directorate	Social Care Health and Housing		
Service	Housing Needs		
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SECTION 1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This policy document has been produced to set out how Central Bedfordshire Council will deliver the Local Welfare Provision (LWP) scheme that was adopted by Central Bedfordshire Council's Executive on 5th February 2013.
- 1.2 The Council's LWP scheme has been set up following the cessation of the discretionary aspects of the Social Fund in March 2013, formerly operated by the Department for Work & Pensions.
- 1.3 The purpose of the LWP scheme is to support the most vulnerable and deprived people within Central Bedfordshire. This scheme is applicable where there is no alternate way to prevent serious damage or serious risk to the health and safety of individuals and their households.
- 1.4 Local Welfare Provision is provided through the form of Emergency Provision (formerly Crisis Loans) and Grant Provision (formerly Community Care Grants), which are defined in section 3.
- 1.5 The Local Welfare Provision service is administered within the Housing Solutions service in the Social Care, Health and Housing directorate.

SECTION 2. PURPOSE

- 2.1 The purpose of this policy document is to set out the aims, eligibility criteria and arrangements to fairly administer the Local Welfare Provision scheme as adopted by Executive in February 2013 and amended by the Director of Social care health and Housing under delegated authority following a six month review of the scheme.
- 2.2 The aims of the scheme are:
 - 2.2.1 To assist the short term needs of those in crisis/exceptional hardship through emergency provision,
 - 2.2.2 To assist those needing help to establish or maintain their independence within Central Bedfordshire through grant provision,
 - 2.2.3 To support applicants through difficult times by providing budget management advice and signposting to relevant services,
 - 2.2.4 To make best use of the Council's resources through the provision of goods, vouchers and services where cash is not the most appropriate form of provision.
 - 2.2.5 To deliver a scheme flexible enough to adequately meet the individual needs and circumstances of applicants but with sufficient protocols and scrutiny to safeguard appropriate use of public funds.
 - 2.2.6 To manage the limited amount of ring-fenced funding available effectively and fairly.

SECTION 3. SCOPE, DEFINITIONS AND RELATED POLICIES

3.1 Definitions

- 3.1.1 Emergency provision – provides “top ups” for gas and electric prepayment meters and supermarket vouchers to enable food to be purchased in emergency situations.
- 3.1.2 Grant provision – provides goods and services to help vulnerable people to live as independent a life as possible in the community.
- 3.1.3 Reasonable proof – proof is evidence gathered through the application process, as set out in the application procedure. The decision as to whether the evidence is reasonable is to the discretion of the officer dealing with the application within the guidelines set out in the application procedure.

SECTION 4. POLICY STATEMENT

4.1 Eligible persons

- 4.1.1 Applications for emergency and grant provision will only be considered if the applicant has been continuously resident in Central Bedfordshire six out of the 12 months or three out of the five years prior to the date the application is submitted. If applicant does not pass this criteria but can demonstrate that they are currently resident and prove a permanent intention to remain within the local authority area, then an application will also be considered.
- 4.1.2 Applicants must be aged 16 or over.

4.2 Emergency provision eligibility criteria

- 4.2.1 The applicant must provide reasonable proof that they have suffered an emergency or disaster.
- 4.2.2 The applicant does not have enough money to meet immediate and essential day to day living expenses for themselves or members of their household,
- 4.2.3 The applicant must provide reasonable proof that there is no other way to prevent serious damage or serious risk to the health, or safety of themselves or a member of their household.
- 4.2.4 An application will be refused if assistance from other services may be more appropriate. The applicant will be signposted to the appropriate services in these cases.

- 4.2.5 Should an applicant be deemed to have created a financial hardship by means of benefit sanction, loss of employment due to misconduct or any other circumstances deemed to be self imposed then an application may be refused.
- 4.2.6 An applicant cannot apply for emergency provision if they were successfully awarded an emergency provision payment within the previous 6 months.
- 4.2.7 If an applicant was successfully awarded an emergency provision payment within the previous 12 months and applies for another award after 6 months of being awarded the provision, he/she may be asked to attend a financial review before the application is considered.

4.3 Grant provision eligibility criteria

- 4.3.1 Applicants must be in receipt of one of the following benefits or likely to receive them within the next six weeks and provide evidence to prove this:
 - 4.3.1.1 Income support
 - 4.3.1.2 Employment and Support Allowance
 - 4.3.1.3 Job Seekers Allowance
 - 4.3.1.4 Pension Credit
- 4.3.2 Applicants must meet at least one of the following criteria:
 - 4.3.2.1 Applicants are leaving residential or institutional care – e.g. care home, hospital or prison and provide evidence of this.
 - 4.3.2.2 Applicants are being resettled into a new home by Central Bedfordshire Council or a voluntary organisation following an unsettled period in their lives.
 - 4.3.2.3 Applicants are looking after someone who is ill, disabled or just out of prison.
 - 4.3.2.4 Applicants need assistance to stay in their homes to avoid going into residential care or hospital.
 - 4.3.2.5 Applicants need help with expenses to go to a relative's funeral or visit someone who is ill.
 - 4.3.2.6 Applicants need help because they or their family face exceptional pressure – e.g. because of family breakdown or illness.
- 4.3.3 Should an applicant be deemed to have created a financial hardship by means of benefit sanction, loss of employment due to misconduct or any other circumstances deemed to be self imposed then an application may be refused.

- 4.3.4 An application will be refused if assistance from other services may be more appropriate. The applicant will be signposted to the appropriate services in these cases.
- 4.3.5 If an applicant was successfully awarded a grant provision, he/she cannot apply for the same goods or services within 12 months.
- 4.3.6 If an applicant was successfully awarded a grant provision and applies for an award for other goods or services within 12 months he/she may be asked to attend a financial review before the application is considered.
- 4.3.7 If an applicant owes money to Central Bedfordshire Council they are not eligible for assistance through Grant Provision. However, if an applicant has a repayment plan in place and can demonstrate that they have been making the required payments then Grant Provision can be considered.

SECTION 5. POLICY DETAILS

5.1 LWP application process

- 5.1.1 The application process is set out in the LWP application procedure.
- 5.1.2 Each case will be assessed on its own merits.
- 5.1.3 Award amounts and availability will be subject to sufficient funds being available in line with budgetary spend and forecasting.

5.2 Right to appeal

- 5.2.1 The right to appeal is set out in the Appeals procedure.
- 5.2.2 LWP decisions are not subject to statutory appeals processes and therefore the final decision remains with Central Bedfordshire Council.

5.3 Complaints

- 5.3.1 Complaints relating to the way the applications are handled must be dealt with through the Council's complaints procedure.

5.4 Fraud

- 5.4.1 The Council is committed to the prevention and detection of fraud within all its services. Should a fraudulent claim be identified, applicants may have committed an offence under the Fraud Act 2006, and the matter may be referred to the Council's Fraud Team for further action.

SECTION 6. LEGAL AND REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

- 6.1 The Welfare Reform Act 2012 introduced the power for councils to operate a local scheme to replace the Social Fund discretionary elements (Crisis Loans and Community Care Grants). A local scheme is non-statutory and so councils have complete discretion about the type of scheme operated.
- 6.2 This policy has regard to legislation relating to the equal and fair treatment of applicants such as the Human Rights Act 1998 and Equality Act 2010.
- 6.3 The policy and procedures set out protocols to prevent and detect potential cases of fraud as defined in the Fraud Act 2006.

SECTION 7. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY

- 7.1 An Equality Impact Assessment has been carried out on this policy, the LWP application procedure and appeals procedure.
- 7.2 Processes, training and internal review protocols have been designed to eliminate discrimination and advance equality of opportunity.
- 7.3 To ensure that applicants have an equal opportunity to access the service and receive LWP where eligible, applicants' diversity information will be gathered, monitored and reported.

SECTION 8. MONITORING AND REPORTING ARRANGEMENTS

- 8.1 The LWP operational board will monitor the scheme's performance on a monthly basis.
- 8.2 The application procedure sets out how day to day monitoring and management of the service will be carried out.

SECTION 9. INFORMATION AND TRAINING

- 9.1 Further information can be obtained from Local Welfare Provision team via LWP@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk
- 9.2 Training on the policy and its procedures will be available within the Local Welfare Provision team. Consistency in approach will be maintained through mentoring and spot check review of decisions.

SECTION 10. RESPONSIBILITIES

- 10.1 Responsibility for the implementation of this policy and its procedures resides with the LWP team.

- 10.2 Monitoring of the policy resides with the Local Welfare Reform operational board.

SECTION 11. EVALUATION AND REVIEW

- 11.1 The performance indicators to review the effectiveness of this policy and its procedures are included in the application procedure.
- 11.2 This policy will be reviewed annually.