

Revenues and Benefits

Policy for the award of Local Welfare Provision

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The purpose of this policy is to specify how the Revenues and Benefits Service will operate the scheme and to indicate some of the factors that will be considered when deciding if a Local Welfare Provision (LWP) award can be made.

1. Objectives of Local Welfare Provision

1.1 The Revenues and Benefits Service treats all customers that make an application for a Local Welfare Provision award fairly. Each application will be considered strictly on its own merits.

1.2 Our objectives are in line with Council's priorities, in particular to reduce inequalities by protecting the most vulnerable in Bolton by:

- Safeguarding people's housing/tenancies
- Sustaining vulnerable households
- Preventing homelessness
- Alleviating poverty
- Encouraging and sustaining employment
- Helping residents to help themselves
- Keeping families together
- Supporting the vulnerable in the local community
- Helping people through personal crises and difficult events
- Supporting young people in the transition to adult life

1.3 The purpose of the LWP scheme in Bolton is to assist vulnerable people in the Bolton community in meeting their needs for subsistence or financial support where they have a short term immediate need. Support will also be provided to help residents maintain their independence in the community.

1.4 To ensure LWP is awarded to those in the greatest need the scheme includes a means test. Those customers that are determined to have sufficient income, savings or access to suitable credit will not be eligible for LWP.

1.5 In addition to LWP, Bolton Council administers Discretionary Housing Payments and a Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme. Both these schemes are aimed at helping residents to meet housing costs. LWP will not be used where it is felt a customer's needs will be more appropriately met through one of these schemes.

1.6 The LWP scheme will not award cash payments, support will be provided in the form of goods and services. The Revenues and Benefits Service will work with partner organisations to deliver appropriate goods and services.

2. The Local Welfare Provision Scheme

The LWP scheme helps people who need short term help in an emergency and to those who may need financial help to maintain a home.

2.1 Short term help may be available to people who:

- Have no essential food.
- Need essential goods associated with infants/children.
- Have no heating or light.
- Require help with emergency travel costs.
- Have suffered a major upheaval or disaster.

2.1.1 Awards will not be cash based and the Revenues and Benefits Service will work with partner organisations to deliver appropriate goods and services. Awards may be limited to one in any rolling period of 6 months.

2.1.2 Where appropriate, the applicant will be expected to engage with the council and other relevant agencies to help resolve any major financial issues.

2.1.3 Failure to engage with the Council may result in the refusal of any further application for support.

2.2 Financial help with maintaining a home may be available to people who:

- Are leaving long term care.
- Are leaving prison.
- Are fleeing domestic violence.
- Have moved from supported accommodation into independent living

2.2.1 The Revenues and Benefits Service will work with partner organisations to deliver appropriate goods and services such as

- Beds & bedding - single & double beds
- Fridges and freezers or fridge-freezer
- Cookers (electric only)
- Washing machines
- Settees
- Chairs
- Carpets

3. Eligibility Criteria

3.1 In all cases, the applicant should be:

- Aged 16 + and
- Have a local connection

3.2 For short term help or help in a crisis, the applicant must also

- Not have had an award in the last 6 months
- Have complied with any requirements connected with a previous award

The following people would not be eligible for short term help:

- Residents in care facilities or foster care
- Members of a religious order where they are being maintained
- Prisoners released on temporary license
- Anyone living at home as a dependent

3.3 For help in maintaining a home, the applicant must also show they need help to

- Remain in the community, or
- Become established in the community, or
- Require help to ease exceptional family pressure and
- Receive a means tested benefit

Means tested benefits include: - Housing Benefit, Local Council Tax Support, Income Support Income Based Job Seekers Allowance, Income Related Employment Support Allowance, Pension Credit Guarantee, and Universal Credit

4. Making an Application

4.1 The online application form can be accessed using desktop computers, laptops, tablets or by smart phone. However, those customers who are unable to access the internet will be able to make a supported claim by telephone or in the One Stop Shop based, as appropriate.

4.2 The online application process will also enable customers to receive support from various partner organisations, many of which are active members of the Council's Financial Inclusion Forum.

4.3 Any application received from a third party such as an appointee or representative must have the applicant's consent.

4.4 Repeat applications will only be accepted in exceptional circumstances and will be subject to criteria including the date the last application was made and any failure on the part of the applicant to accept reasonable support and advice as a condition of any previous award.

5. Scheme Administration

Applications for short term help in an emergency or crisis will be prioritised so applicants will know when to expect decisions. The Council aim to make decision on food, travel costs and fuel costs on the day of request.

5.1 Help with Food

5.1.1 The Revenues and Benefits Service works with Urban Outreach (Reg. Charity No. 1044203) to provide food packages.

5.1.2 Food packages can be collected from Urban Outreach at specified times. In exceptional circumstances, a food package may be delivered to the applicant's home. The contents of the food package will be determined by family size. Although food packages will be based on family size, there will be the ability to tailor packages to reasonable customer requirements including vegetarian and halal. Other essential items are available where appropriate including nappies.

5.1.3 The applicant will be notified of the outcome of their application via email, text or phone call.

5.1.4 Food packages are designed to last for 1 week, although it is accepted that in some circumstances it may be necessary to provide repeat packages.

5.1.5 Dependant on customer circumstances, a referral to a partner agency may be appropriate including debt advice, money skills, housing advice and welfare benefit advice.

5.2 Travel Costs

Help with travel costs will only be provided if it is an emergency and it could not have been anticipated. Tickets will be provided, and no cash will be issued.

5.3 Fuel Costs

Top up payments for gas and electric will be administered by Urban Outreach. The applicant will be notified of the outcome of their application via email, text or phone call and advised to visit Urban Outreach.

5.4 Furniture

The Revenues and Benefits Service will work with partner organisations to deliver appropriate goods and services such as

- Beds & bedding - single & double beds
- Fridges and freezers or fridge-freezer
- Cookers (electric only)
- Washing machines
- Settees
- Chairs

5.4.1 The applicant will be notified of the outcome of their application via email, text or phone call. Dependant on the applicant's circumstances, a referral to a partner agency may be appropriate, including debt advice, money skills, housing advice welfare benefit advice or

5.4.2 In some cases it may be more appropriate to offer a customer a loan via Bolton's Credit Union (HOOT). This decision will be made on a case by case basis taking into account the applicant's circumstances.

6. Appeal Rights

The applicant or their authorised representative will have the right to request a decision is reviewed.

6.1 Reasons for requesting a decision is reviewed could include:

- An award or a repeat award being refused
- Method of payment
- Value of award
- To whom the support is awarded

6.2 When requesting a review of a decision, the applicant will be expected to give reasons why they feel the original decision should be reviewed and where appropriate provide additional information to support their request.

6.3 The appeal process will have 2 stages:

Stage 1: All requests for a review of decision will be considered by a decision maker and notified within agreed timescales

Stage 2: If the applicant is not satisfied with the outcome of the review they may submit an appeal within an agreed timescale of being notified of the review outcome. Stage 2 appeals will be considered by an appeals officer, taking into account all the information and evidence included in the review. The decision will be notified in writing within an agreed timescale.

6.4 There will be no further right of appeal beyond Stage 2; however, the right to make a complaint through the Council's complaints procedure will remain.