

Leicester City Council Community Support Grant Policy

1. What is the Leicester City Council Community Support Grant (CSG)?

1.1 This scheme helps vulnerable people in short-term crisis to meet urgent needs, or to maintain their independence in the community.

2. What are the main features of the scheme?

2.1. It is only open to Leicester residents, those moving to a tenancy within the city, those fleeing from domestic violence or those with a link to Leicester. See the Glossary for more details.

2.2. Each case will be treated strictly on its own merits and you will receive fair and equal treatment.

2.3. It reflects the Council's commitment to work with voluntary advice services to provide budgeting and income maximisation advice and repeat applicants will be expected to engage with these services.

2.4. There is a limit of two awards within a rolling twelve month period. However, this is subject to exceptions.

3. What type of help is available?

3.1 For Crisis Grants help includes food, essential clothing, fuel and electricity costs. This will usually be issued in the form of food parcels, credits uploaded on to fuel cards or vouchers.

3.2 Support Grants will usually be issued in the form of reuse furniture or reconditioned white goods. Delivery will then be arranged by the suppliers with you or your support worker.

4. Am I eligible for support?

4.1 You must be over the age of 16, meet the conditions in 2.1 and have a low income – whether in receipt of welfare benefits, low income or pension credit.

4.2 You must have exhausted other means of alternative funding, including private funding, insurance, and DWP funding. See Appendix A for more details.

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4.3 For Crisis Grants, you will need to be able to demonstrate exceptional financial hardship. See the Glossary for more details.

4.4 For Support Grants, you should be in receipt of any of the following: be receiving IS, JSA (income-based) or ESA (income-related), or another low income with less than £500 in savings. We will consider other exceptional circumstances at our discretion.

4.5 The award is intended to support a person with limited financial means to return to, or remain in the community.

4.6 If your benefit claim is undergoing a sanction, please see Section 2(iv) of Appendix B.

5. Are my personal circumstances taken into account?

5.1 The following personal circumstances will be taken into account during the decision making process:

- a) Whether a CSG payment would prevent homelessness;
- b) Whether a CSG payment would help you maintain employment, education or training; or
- c) Whether a CSG payment would prevent a move that would have a detrimental effect on you and your household, for example children's schooling, health, support networks or employment.

5.2 Crisis Grant. This covers help where you have suffered an emergency or crisis, for example, a fire or flood. This crisis will be the cause of a severe risk to the health and safety of the applicant or an immediate family member/dependant(s). Examples of when your health and safety might be at severe risk include:

- a) no access to essential needs (food, heating and clothing);
- b) imminent deterioration/deterioration in health;
- c) domestic abuse;
- d) neglect and harm;
- e) breakdown of the family unit;
- f) exceptionally poor living conditions;
- g) onset of, or deterioration in the health of an immediate family member;
- h) risk of homelessness deemed to be unintentional.

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5.3 If you have dependent children between the ages of 7 and 16, who meet free school meal criteria, and you are suffering a crisis, you can apply for food parcels during the school holiday periods. Households with dependent children of Reception age and in Years 3 and 4 must meet the free schools meals claim criteria as applied prior to September 2014 when changes to free school meals criteria were introduced.

5.4 Support Grant. This helps you to establish a home or remain in the community when you are under exceptional financial pressure but do not have an immediate need. Examples of when you might be under exceptional financial pressure include the following:

- a) you have suffered a disaster (such as a fire or flood);
- b) you are leaving care or prison;
- c) you have had to move due to violence, or fear of violence;
- d) you are leaving accommodation where you received significant care and supervision, you should also be expecting to move out within 6 weeks.
- e) you, or a member of your family, suffers from a disability or chronic illness which gives rise to an exceptional need, and which cannot be met by another support fund;
or
- f) you are a former member of the armed forces.

6. How do I apply?

6.1 By telephone, call: 0116 454 1019, between 8.30am and 5pm from Monday to Friday. For an out-of-hours emergency, you can call: 0116 255 1606.

6.2 If you are homeless, or think you are at risk of being homeless, please call 0116 454 1008.

7. How long will it take?

7.1 For Crisis Grants, a decision is usually made within two working hours of receipt of a verified and completed application form.

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7.2 For Support Grants, a decision is usually made within 10 working days of receipt of a verified and completed application, and successful claimants may have to wait for up to 5 days for delivery of the items.

7.3 An advisor will contact you by telephone, email or text to let you know if you have been successful. A letter will also be sent to you by post explaining the decision. Leicester City Council will set out the reasons for why the decision was made and explain your right of appeal.

7.4 Alternative arrangements will be put in place as necessary for those who do not have a permanent contact address.

8. What can I do if I want the decision to be reviewed?

8.1 If you are unhappy with the decision, you can write to Leicester City Council's Head of the Revenues and Customer Support Service, explaining why you think the decision should be changed. You will need to sign your letter and make sure it reaches the Council within one calendar month of the date of the original decision. - Your application will then be reviewed by a senior officer of the Revenues & Customer Support Service.

8.2 If you remain unhappy with the decision after it has been reviewed, you have the right to challenge the decision through judicial review. The High Court may be asked to consider whether the Council has acted within its powers.

9. How does Leicester City Council prevent fraudulent claims for the CSG scheme?

9.1 If you falsely declare your circumstances, provide a false statement or provide false evidence in support of your application, you may have committed an offence under the Fraud Act 2006.

9.2 Leicester City Council will investigate allegations of fraud and retains the right to prosecute such cases under section 222 of the Local Government Act 1972.

10. Are the application form and this document accessible in other formats?

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10.1 If you would like a hard copy or large print version please contact Leicester City Council on 0116 454 1006 or via email at SDIO@leicester.gov.uk or by post at the following free post address: Freepost RTRE-HTRJ-CSSJ, Service Improvement Team, Leicester City Council, Revenues & Benefits Department, York House, 91 Granby Street, LEICESTER, LE1 6FB.

Appendix A: Background and Legislative Framework

1. Background

1.1 Prior to 1 April 2013, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) Social Fund scheme consisted of a regulated scheme made up of Sure Start Maternity Grants, Funeral Payments, Cold Weather Payments and Winter Fuel Payments, and a discretionary scheme made up of Community Care Grants, Budgeting Loans and Crisis Loans. The Welfare Reform Act 2012 abolished Community Care Grants and Crisis Loans from 1 April 2013 and replaced them with a new Local Welfare Provision (LWP) administered by local authorities.

1.2 From 1 April 2013, Crisis Loan alignment payments and other Crisis Loans paid due to issues with benefit were replaced by a new national scheme of Short Term Benefit Advances (STBAs) administered by the DWP. Budgeting Loans continue for 'legacy' benefit claimants only, i.e. recipients of Jobseeker's Allowance (Income-based), Employment and Support Allowance (Income-related) and Income Support). Universal Credit (UC) claimants are able to apply for a Budgeting Advance.

1.3 The Government allocated the Council a grant to deliver a local scheme to meet local priorities. There was no requirement to replicate the current Crisis Loan or Community Care Grant schemes. The Council was provided with the funding and flexibility to design emergency provision for vulnerable groups according to local circumstances, in order to meet severe hardship in the most appropriate way.

1.4 The Council was encouraged to:

- i) work in partnership with local third sector organisations to develop their scheme;

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- ii) explore a range of in-kind support, and to link to advice, information and advocacy;
- iii) explore a full range of models for delivery.

1.5 In the development of CSG the Council fulfilled its duty to consult with all major stakeholders. The service is committed to continuing to work with the local voluntary sector, social landlords and other key stakeholders in the City to maximise entitlement to all available state benefits, charitable funds and grants; this is reflected in the administration of CSG. It will also continue to work closely with money and welfare benefits advice services across the city to provide budgeting and income maximisation advice, and will continue to consult with all stakeholders on the effectiveness of this policy.

1.6 In January 2014, the government announced that it would no longer provide central funding for local welfare assistance schemes operated by local authorities from April 2015. This decision was confirmed following further consultation in November 2014.

1.7 The Council will continue to operate the scheme on the basis of reserves accumulated from previous grants being available.

1.8 From 6 April 2016, Local welfare funds were designated as 'public funds' for immigration purposes. This means that CSG cannot be used to support any person from abroad without recourse to public funds.

1.9 While an assessment of habitual residence is pending, CSG may assist those with a presumption of eligibility with a short-term award of food and essential items only.

2. Finance and Monitoring

2.1 The financial management of the budget will be undertaken through the corporate financial audit procedures. The purpose is to ensure the CSG decision making is robust, meets the intention of the policy, is transparent and is making

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decisions that allow for sufficient funds to meet demands on the CSG budget throughout the financial year.

2.2 The Council will undertake monitoring of the number, amount and period of CSGS awards in relation to the available CSG budget. The Council's Quality Assurance Team Leader will ensure that an audit check is conducted of 5% of the decisions made to ensure consistent decision-making.

2.3 The policy will be reviewed annually or at such time or occurrence where a review is appropriate.

2.4 Each application will be treated strictly on its own merits. You will receive equal and fair treatment within a transparent process taking full account of the Council's responsibilities under all relevant government legislation and to meet our standing statutory duties under Homelessness, Equality, Human Rights, Child Poverty and Child Protection legislation. Decisions under the scheme are made in accordance with the principles of good decision making and decision makers will act fairly, reasonably and consistently. Details of the legislative framework and equality monitoring arrangements of the scheme are provided in section 3.

2.5 The Council will also monitor cases where a CSG application has been refused or supported to ensure decisions are being made fairly and consistently.

2.6 The Council is subject to the general equality duty. This means that steps will be taken to monitor implementation of this policy to ensure no one is subject to disproportionate adverse treatment because they had a protected characteristic. The Council's equality duty requires that the Council has due regard to the need to:

- i) Remove or minimise disadvantages suffered by persons who share a relevant protected characteristic that are connected to that characteristic;
- ii) Take steps to meet the needs of persons who share relevant protected characteristic that are different from the needs of persons who do not share it; and
- iii) Foster good relations.

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3. Legislative framework & equality monitoring arrangements

3.1 The Council has taken all relevant legislation into account when devising the Community Support Grant policy, including but not limited to:

- i) The Welfare Reform Act 2012
- ii) The Localism Act 2011
- iii) The Equality Act 2010
- iv) The Local Government Finance Act 2012 and 1992
- v) The Local Government Act 2003
- vi) The Leicester City Council Tax Reduction Scheme 2015/16
- vii) The Council Tax Reduction Schemes (Prescribed Requirements) (England) Regulations 2012 Default Scheme
- viii) The Social Security Act 1992
- ix) The Universal Credit Regulations 2012 and accompanying legislation
- x) The Local Government Act 1972 section 222
- xi) The Fraud Act 2006, section 2
- xii) The Data Protection Act 1998
- xiii) The Housing Act 1996
- xiv) The Social Security Act 1986
- xv) The National Assistance Act 1948
- xvi) The Child Poverty Act 2010
- xvii) The Chronically Sick & Disabled Persons Act 1970
- xviii) The Disabled Persons (Services, consultation and representation) Act 1986
- xix) The Mental Health Act 1983
- xx) The Children Act 1989
- xxi) The Care Act 2014
- xxii) Statement of changes to the Immigration Rules: HC877, 11 March 2016

3.2 In addition to the above requirements, the Council also takes account of current guidance and advice which has been published by the DWP and local policy which includes:

- i) Local support to replace Community Care Grants and Crisis Loans for living expenses in England, June 2011;

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- ii) Social Fund Community Care Grants – Department for Work & Pensions (DWP) Customer Insight Research Report 2, 2011;
- iii) Local Authority field work summary report, December 2011;
- iv) The Leicester Child Poverty Commission (2013) (Recommendation 18).

3.3 The Council has engaged extensively with stakeholder groups on this policy and is supported by a comprehensive Impact Assessment.

4. Priority groups

4.1 The following circumstances may place you in a priority group:

- i) Whether you are fleeing domestic abuse;
- ii) Whether you are a care leaver;
- iii) Whether you or another household member is subject to Social Services intervention;
- iv) Whether you or another household member is undertaking care duties for relatives in the area;
- v) Whether you are a returning ex-offender who is having difficulty in finding suitable accommodation;
- vi) Whether you are a former member of the armed forces who is having difficulty in finding suitable accommodation;
- vii) The exceptional nature of you and your family's circumstances;
- viii) Any reasons which make it necessary or especially desirable for you to occupy the dwelling you currently reside in the view of the assessor;
- ix) Whether the payment of a CSG award keep you and your family together;
- x) Whether it support a young person in the transition to adult life, or will it assist in the safeguarding of a vulnerable adult or child;
- xi) Whether you have a physical or mental condition that if not managed correctly will result in a serious health risk.

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Appendix B: Financial and Personal Circumstances

We will consider your circumstances in full before deciding whether or not to award a CSG taking into account the following:

1. Financial Considerations

- i) Proximity of essential services relied upon by you and your partner to your home;
- ii) The relevant financial, medical and social circumstances of you and your household;
- iii) The income and essential expenditure of the customer and their household when considering income;
- iv) Whether your expenditure is considered to be above your basic living requirements. If your expenses seem high, the CSG assessor will make enquiries with you to clarify the details;
- v) Savings and investments held by you and your household, which could be used to assist your financial situation. The accessibility of these funds will be taken into account, including any risk of financial exploitation, and the award may be reduced;
- vi) Whether you have insurance to help you recover the costs of the lost goods. Your grant may be reduced by an equivalent amount;
- vii) Whether other family members outside your household help in any way towards your financial expenditure;
- viii) Whether you and your household could reduce expenditure on non-essential items;
- ix) Whether the you and your household are entitled to other welfare benefits but are not claiming them;
- x) Your the level of indebtedness;
- xi) Whether the you and your household are taking long-term action to help their problems in meeting their housing costs; and
- xii) Any steps taken by you to help yourself such as financial advice you have sought to alleviate your situation, such as from Citizens Advice Leicestershire, local advice agencies or the Welfare Rights Service.

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2. Claim Requirements

2.1 If you claim JSA, ESA, or Universal Credit, you will be expected to first apply for a Short Term Benefit Advance (STBA) or Universal Credit Advance (UCA).

i) If you have applied for a STBA or UCA and you have been informed that this will be granted, you may apply for a Crisis Grant. If your CSG application is successful, the award will cover the period until receipt of your first STBA payment (usually 14 days from application).

ii) If you have applied for a JSA or ESA STBA and you are excluded from the STBA or you have received a negative decision, you may apply for a Crisis Grant. If your CSG application is successful, the award will cover a period of up to 4 weeks or receipt of your first welfare benefit payment, whichever is earlier.

iii) If you have claimed Universal Credit but you are excluded from a UCA or have received a negative decision, you may apply for a Crisis Grant. If successful, the award will cover a period up to 8 weeks or receipt of your first welfare benefit payment, whichever is earlier.

iv) Up to 14 days crisis support - If your JSA, ESA or UC claim is undergoing a sanction, disallowance or suspension, you will be expected to first apply for a DWP hardship award through the JobCentre Plus. If you receive a positive decision for a hardship award, you may apply for a Crisis Grant.

If your CSG application is successful, the award will cover the period until receipt of your first hardship payment (usually 14 days from application);

v) If your JSA, ESA or UC claim is undergoing a sanction, disallowance or suspension and you are excluded from applying for hardship or have received a negative decision for a hardship award, you may apply for a Crisis Grant.

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vi) If your application for a CSG award is successful the crisis payment will cover a period up to 4 weeks extending to a maximum of 13 weeks in exceptional circumstances or receipt of your first welfare benefit payment, whichever is earlier;

vii) If you have claimed UC and an award decision has been made but you have not yet received a payment, you may apply for a CSG.

viii) If your application for a CSG award is successful the crisis payment will cover a period up to 8 weeks or when your first payment of welfare benefit is paid, whichever is earlier; and

ix) Food parcel - To support vulnerable households where an immediate hardship payment is granted, however these payments take 24 hours to arrive.

2.2 These are the circumstances for, or in, which no assistance will be given (excluded persons)

i. people in hospital and care homes (independent or local authority) with no plans for discharge within 2 weeks;

ii. prisoners and people lawfully detained or on release on temporary license;

iii. members of a religious order who are fully maintained by it;

iv. people treated as in full-time relevant education who are not in receipt of welfare benefit these persons will only be considered to receive support for expenses arising out of a disaster.

v. full-time students not in receipt of UC, IS, JSA (IB), ESA (IR) or Pension Credit (including payments on account) – these persons will only be considered to receive support for expenses arising out of a disaster;

vi. someone who meets the legal definition of a 'Person From Abroad' these persons will only be considered to receive support for expenses arising out of a disaster whilst their status is being determined;

vii. those whose benefit claim is disqualified, disallowed or sanctioned in relation to their JSA, ESA, IS or Pension Credit. DWP hardship payments should assist such claims;

viii. where other statutory provisions are in place; including but not restricted to:

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- ix. DWP budgeting loans, DWP benefit alignment payments, DWP short term benefit advances, and DWP statutory social fund payments (for example: winter fuel allowance);
- x. people who have made two applications to the Community Support Grant Scheme within the current financial year – except in extreme circumstances;
- xi. for items other than that which the Council can provide or needs which are not covered by Crisis Grant;
- xii. where private insurance covers costs of the damage;
- xiii. where liability exists elsewhere which addresses the issue (for example if a ceiling falls down because of a leak in the flat above);
- xiv. solely due to unexpected budgeting issues without a causal emergency or crisis;
- xv. a need for a person who resides outside England;
- xvi. when the CSG budget has been exhausted;

2.3 Assistance will be limited to support for expenses arising out of a disaster for, or in, the following circumstances:

- i) persons treated as in full-time relevant education or full-time students not entitled to UC, IS, JSA (income-based), ESA (income-related) or PC (Guarantee Credit).

2.4 Crisis Grants are not available for the following:

- i) a need which occurs outside United Kingdom;
- ii) an educational or training need including clothing and tools (the DWP is able to support with these);
- iii) distinctive school uniform or sports clothes for use at school or equipment to be used at school;
- iv) travelling expenses to or from school;
- v) school meals taken during school holidays by children who are entitled to free school meals;
- vi) expenses in connection with court (legal) proceedings such as legal fees, court fees, fines, costs, damages, subsistence or travelling expenses (other than emergency travelling expenses when stranded away from home);

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- vii) removal or storage charges if you are being re-housed following a compulsory purchase order, a redevelopment or closing order, a compulsory exchange of tenancies, or under a housing authority's statutory duty to the homeless;
- viii) domestic assistance and respite care;
- ix) any repair to council property and any repair to property of certain housing trusts (details of which can be found by contacting Leicester City Council);
- x) a medical, surgical, optical, aural or dental item or service (these needs can be provided free of charge by the National Health Service, if you receive IS, JSA (IB), ESA (IR), the maximum award of Universal Credit (supported by relevant SOS letter and qualifying criteria) or Pension Credit (guarantee credit);
- xi) work related expenses;
- xii) debts to Government departments or investments;
- xiii) purchase, installation, rental and call charges for a telephone;
- xiv) mobility needs;
- xv) holidays;
- xvi) a television or a radio, or a licence, aerial or rental charges for a television or a radio;
- xvii) garaging, parking, purchase, and running costs of any motor vehicle except where the payment is being considered for emergency travel expenses;
- xviii) housing costs, (other than intermittent costs not met by Housing Benefit, Income Support, Jobseeker's Allowance (income-based), Employment and Support Allowance (income-related) or Pension Credit, certain rent in advance payments, certain boarding charges, and minor repairs and improvements);
- xix) council tax, council water charges, arrears of community charge, collective community charge contributions or community water charges.

The above list is not exhaustive and whilst it is indicative of the rationale applied to the scheme, The Council will always consider exceptions.

Appendix C: Glossary

Disaster

This is 'an event that causes great distress or destruction' and includes major flooding, gas explosions or a house fire, but it is not expected that a minor mishap or damage or failure of a household item would be included in this situation in most circumstances. A disaster could also cover having no financial funds available to meet daily living expenses as a result of some sort of crisis, such as theft or unintended loss.

In cases of theft, the claim must be supported by a crime reference number. In cases of loss, the claimant must be able to demonstrate that the loss is not their fault.

Person From Abroad

A Person From Abroad is someone who fails or would fail the habitual residence test for the purpose of Income Support, Pension Credit, Income-based Job Seekers Allowance, Income Related Employment Support Allowance or Universal Credit.

Link to Leicester

Applicants may be considered to meet the 'link to Leicester' criteria in 2.1 of the Policy by satisfying at least one of the following:

- Applicants living within the city of Leicester must be able to produce documentary evidence that they have used a residential address within the City as their settled home for 2 consecutive years immediately prior to their application;
- Applicants that have previously lived in settled accommodation in the city of Leicester for 3 consecutive years or more out of the last 5 years;
- Applicants currently working within the city of Leicester and have been for the last 12 months;
- People who are aged over 18 and approved as a homeless person under Part VII of the Housing Act 1996;
- Applicants who need to give or receive support to direct family members who have been living in the city for the past 5 years. Direct family members include husbands, wives, civil partners, parents, sons, daughters, brothers and sisters;
- Asylum seekers who have been dispersed to the City by the National Asylum Support service (NASS) and whose status changes to that of refugee, or who are awarded exceptional or indefinite leave to remain whilst living in the city;

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- Persons who have previously served in the armed forces and they make an application for housing within 5 years of their discharge;
- Bereaved spouses and civil partners of members of the Armed Forces leaving service family accommodation following the death of their spouse/partner;
- Prisoners released from prison who meet one of the above criteria prior to them entering service or prison.

Severe Financial Hardship

This means that you have limited disposable income and you or your household are at risk of severe detriment to your health and safety.

Intentional Homelessness

Being intentionally homeless means that you are homeless because you left accommodation that you could have stayed in. If your last home was temporary or short-term, the Council looks into the reasons you left your last 'settled home'.

When deciding if you are or aren't intentionally homeless, the council must consider the reasons you became homeless. It's up to the Council to prove that you became homeless intentionally and that:

- you did, or failed to do, something that caused you to leave your home
- the act, or failure to act, was deliberate or you were aware of what was going on
- it was reasonable for you to continue living in your accommodation.

You have the right to explain your actions to the Council in relation to your housing situation.