

## Welfare Grant Scheme

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### Purpose of the Scheme

- 1.1 The purpose of this policy is to specify how South Gloucestershire Council operates the Welfare Grant scheme and to outline the factors considered when deciding qualifying criteria and if a grant can be made and what that grant may consist of.
- 1.2 The scheme is aimed at helping those in need or those that are in immediate crisis to obtain help in the event of unforeseen circumstances or disaster.
- 1.3 The scheme will ensure high quality decision making within agreed service levels.
- 1.4 The policy will treat each applicant fairly and equitably with consideration given to individual circumstances. Wherever possible, the scheme will seek alternative avenues of delivery, which will ensure funding is best targeted to those most in need.
- 1.5 In each case, consideration will be given to the nature, extent, impact, and urgency of the need.
- 1.6 The scheme will meet the needs of the most vulnerable residents, in accordance with the council's equality and child poverty duties.
- 1.7 In addition to receiving applications from individuals and their representatives, the scheme will endeavour to use measures to identify and target support to people most in need.

### 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 or value of any grant made to them. However, there may be circumstances where a financial award will be substantially reduced or refused, 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, gambling or other diagnosed 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
- Care leavers under 25 with no other access to support packages.
- Have moved from supported accommodation/independent living
- 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) please note we are unable to provide gas ovens.
- Essential clothing
- Essential bedding
- Essential domestic items, e.g. cookware

2.7 Awards will not be given for:

- Flooring and Curtains / Redecoration
- Motor vehicle expenses
- Installation of a telephone, telephone line, cable network, mobile phone costs etc
- 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 installation or cost or repair
- Items where the applicant has access to sufficient income or savings
- Costs associated with care provision

- Specialist beds or other specialist equipment
- Replacement or broken items

2.8 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, Household Support Fund, Council Tax Reduction 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.

2.9 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).

2.10 Applicants with a history of repeat applications may be refused and / or referred to other agencies for advice or support.

2.11 **Wholly exceptional circumstances:** SGC reserves the right to vary this scheme as triggered at times of exceptional events such as a declared World Health Organisation Pandemic affecting the area for example Covid-19, a local major disaster or state of emergency as meeting this requirement and varies the scheme at its discretion.

## 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 17 and over who have recourse to public funds and are not subject to immigration control, and who meets the following conditions:

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

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

- Income Support
- Job Seekers Allowance
- Employment and 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
- A personal one-off crisis
- Is NOT the result of civil emergency, state of war or other national, civil or natural disaster (such as flooding, fire with urgent and lifesaving 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. 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.

3.7 If a wholly exceptional circumstance is triggered as stated in 2.12 above then eligibility to assistance both financial and otherwise may be varied at the discretion of SGC.

## **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 of public funds can be made. This may include evidence such as crime reference numbers, DWP benefit award letters, bank statements or tenancy agreements, formal correspondence.

4.6 An application is deemed to have lapsed if requested supporting documentation or information has not been supplied within 3 working days for immediate crisis applications or 14 calendar days for non-emergency household applications. If this evidence is not provided, your application will be withdrawn.

## **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 credit/charge cards
- Goods from local suppliers

5.2 Cash is not held by SGC and payments will **not** be awarded this way. Where goods are awarded through our supplier, the item specifications will be based on the size of the household, and there is no option to upgrade or change the specification of the item awarded.

Applicants are also not able to upgrade the specifications of the item by contributing themselves.

## **Award**

6.1 If the application is successful then the applicant will be required to validate the award within 3 working days where the award is for immediate assistance (under paragraph 2.4 above).

To validate an award, the applicant must attend a Council One Stop Shop site (Kingswood, Patchway or Yate) and provide the following evidence (where not already checked) before they can 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)

In wholly exceptional circumstances alternative arrangements may be made by the council.

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 A pre- paid card awarded for utilities is only valid for 3 days from the date it is collected and can only be used as payment for utilities. At the end of 3 days any unused balance will be reclaimed by South Gloucestershire Council 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.

A pre- paid card awarded for any other item is valid for 14 days from the date it is collected

and can only be used as payment for the item(s) it has been awarded for. At the end of 14 days any unused balance will be reclaimed by South Gloucestershire Council 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 Where an award is made for assistance to establish a home, and a goods voucher is issued, this goods voucher will be sent straight to the supplier. The supplier will then contact the applicant directly to arrange delivery of the award.

6.5 In the event that our suppliers are unable to deliver goods within 4 weeks of validation due to 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 council may determine that it is appropriate for some or all of an award to be issued on a prepaid card. In the event that this is issued and it is spend on items other than that for which it was awarded, or there is otherwise misuse of the card, this element of the award will be cancelled and the applicant would be refused further Welfare Grant applications.

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, by post, or by attending a Council One Stop Shop site to lodge their appeal.

8.2 Reasons for appealing a decision could include:

- The 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) above.
- The applicant does not consider that they should be barred from the scheme under paragraph 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 and supply any further supporting evidence. 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 and ensure all relevant evidence is supplied. 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 awards of grant will be cash limited taking into account historic data, previous awards and other data lawfully accessible to the council and 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 wholly exceptional circumstances arising as detailed in 2.12 above (for example pandemic) the council reserves the right to review funds and exercise discretion on the scheme's delivery.

9.4 Financial management will be undertaken on a monthly basis and normal council budgetary reporting requirements within Financial Regulations, with awards being decided in light of resources, council priorities and the options available.

9.5 As required funds will be allocated on a monthly basis and if the limit has been reached for a given monthly period then no further awards may 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 award 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 to minimise fraud. Such measures will in turn maximise the limited funding available for those most in need.

## **Policy Review**

10.1 This policy is reviewed periodically by the council.

## **Appendix**

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

- Cash back or ATM withdrawals
- Exchanging any unspent card balance for cash
- To purchase entertainment goods such as TV's, computers, music systems or any entertainment or personal services
- Non-essential items
- Cigarettes, alcohol, drugs, and addictive items.
- Lottery tickets
- Repayment of loans or DWP advances
- To cover rent, council tax, household bills or arrears for these.
- Vehicle repairs or costs (including insurance, tax and other).
- To pay a third party for any white goods and other items of furniture such as beds or sofas or armchairs
- Travel: purchase of petrol or diesel, or purchase of public transport or taxi / uber etc.
- Purchase of fast food or use in restaurants / cafes / pubs.