

NORTHUMBERLAND

Northumberland County Council

LOCAL WELFARE ASSISTANCE POLICY

2013-16

NORTHUMBERLAND EMERGENCY TRANSITION SUPPORT (NETs)

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5. Eligibility

5.1 The funds available for support are limited, and therefore very specific eligibility criteria have been created in order to support those most in need.

- The applicant must be aged 16 years or over and be a resident of Northumberland, or in exceptional circumstances be in the process of moving into the county to flee domestic abuse, hate crime, forced marriage or honour based abuse.
- There is usually a limit of 2 support awards per applicant, per financial year (in exceptional circumstances additional applications may be considered at the discretion of NETs).

5.2 Even if the applicant qualifies to make an application there is no guarantee that any support will be provided, although advisers will provide names of other services that may be able to offer support depending on the applicant's own personal circumstances.

• **Emergency Support Qualifying Criteria and Awards**

Exceptional events

- An immediate need for items or services has arisen following an exceptional event or unforeseen circumstances involving the destruction or loss of property or possessions or significant change to circumstances. In other situations unforeseen changes in circumstance (for example hospitalisation / bereavement) might result in an immediate need for goods or services. In assessing these circumstances NETs will consider:
 - The nature of the need: was this unforeseen, could the applicant have reasonably been expected to make provision?
 - The likely impact of the need on the health and well-being of the applicant / household.
 - Applicants must meet all other NETs criteria to benefit from an award.

Health needs

- As a direct result of the inability to afford the goods or services requested either the health of the applicant or a member of their household will immediately deteriorate.
- The applicant would usually also have to meet at least one of the following criteria:
 - Have a serious physical health problem, which they are receiving treatment for
 - Have a dependent child who normally lives with them and their health would be at immediate risk
 - Are homeless, or at risk of homelessness
 - Have a substance or alcohol misuse problem that they are receiving treatment for
 - Are on probation or receiving support relating to their offending history
 - Are affected by, or at risk of domestic abuse, hate crime, honour based abuse or forced marriage
 - Have a learning disability
 - Have a physical or sensory impairment
 - Have a mental health problem, that they are receiving treatment for
 - Are aged 50 or over with support needs

- Are 24 weeks or more pregnant, or, referred by a medical practitioner confirming a pregnancy related condition

In exceptional cases where an imminent deterioration to an applicant's health is expected then there is discretion to provide goods or services where the applicant does not meet the additional criteria listed above.

Assessment for Emergency Support

- There will then be two stages to the assessment of an Emergency Support application:
 - Assessment of Need
 - Financial Assessment

Assessment of Need

- An assessment of need will be carried out to ascertain whether as a direct result of an inability to afford the goods or services requested either the health of the applicant or a member of their household will immediately deteriorate. In addition the applicant or a member of their household who lives with them should also meet at least one of the qualifying criteria.
- Also, in exceptional circumstances where an immediate need for items or services has arisen following occurrence of an exceptional event or unforeseen circumstance; e.g. sudden misfortune involving loss of property or possessions.
- Items provided may include:
 - Food including baby milk and nappies
 - Emergency pre-payment for heating, lighting, solid fuel or reconnection charges
 - Travel expenses to hospital, residential care, emergency accommodation and funerals.
- Methods of support may include (this list is not exhaustive);
 - Internet shopping
 - Supermarket vouchers
 - Pre-payment cards
 - Direct payment to utilities
 - Payment to travel operators (e.g. bus, train and taxi companies)
 - Cash transfer in exceptional cases only
 - Vouchers for food-banks

Financial assessment

- A financial assessment will be carried in order to establish whether the applicant has immediate access to any other form of financial assistance or is able to access other funding or support.
- Whether eligible or not advisers will carry out a holistic assessment of the clients' circumstances and where possible, will look to signpost clients to local or national organisations who might be able to provide help or support.

Emergency Support Awards

- Emergency Support awards are to cover immediate short-term needs only and an award may be for a specific item or a service to meet immediate living expenses for a short period, usually up to 7 days. In some cases there is discretion to provide an

award for a longer period of time, depending on circumstances, where the presenting emergency can be expected to last for longer than 7 days (usually extending up to an extra 7 days).

- Consideration will be given, however, to any circumstance other than the above where it is clear serious harm or risk is present to the applicant or their household if goods or services are not awarded.
- Emergency Support is intended to help the applicant over short-term requirements and may not solve a crisis altogether.
- Emergency support will be in the form of a grant for goods and services. A cash award will only be made in exceptional circumstances. Appendix A shows the process for determining an Emergency Support award.
- Decisions on whether to award will be made within 2 hours. If the decision is made before 1pm, then the support will be provided the same day. If the decision is made after 1pm, every effort will be made to ensure the support is provided on the same day, although there may be occasions where support will be delivered on the next working day.

- **Transition Support Eligibility Criteria and Awards**

Settlement

7.1 Applicant requires support to re/settle into community life within Northumberland:

- Move back into the community after a stay in supported or temporary accommodation or following an unsettled way of life as part of a planned resettlement programme
- Move out of inappropriate accommodation
- Stay in your home and prevent a move into residential care or hospital
- Prevent a serious deterioration of health within the home
- Ease exceptional pressures for an applicant and their family

Health Needs

7.2 As a direct result of the inability to afford the goods or services, the applicants health or the health of a member of the household will immediately deteriorate

7.3 Applicants must also meet at least one of the following criteria:

- Have a dependent child who normally lives with them and their health would be at immediate risk
- Are homeless, or at risk of homelessness
- Have a substance or alcohol misuse problem that they are receiving treatment for
- Are on probation or receiving support relating to their offending history
- Are affected by, or at risk of domestic abuse, hate crime, honour based abuse or forced marriage
- Have a learning disability
- Have a physical or sensory impairment
- Have a mental health problem, that they are receiving treatment for
- Are aged 50 or over with support needs
- Are 24 weeks or more pregnant, or, referred by a medical practitioner confirming a pregnancy related condition

7.4 In addition, the applicant must also be in receipt of one of the following benefits:

- Income Support
- Income Based Job Seekers Allowance
- Income Related Employment Support Allowance
- Any type of Pension Credit
- Universal Credit
- Housing Benefit
- Council Tax Support

and would usually be expected to have applied for a budgeting loan or advance from the DWP and been declined before their application will be considered. (In some exceptional cases NETs has discretion to give an award where the applicant has not applied to DWP for a budgeting loan or an advance. This would usually be done in conjunction with a Trusted Partner.)

Note: Claimants subject to a DWP ‘sanction’ are not necessarily excluded from applying. However, eligibility for support will depend on the applicant’s circumstances.

7.5 Consent must be given to the council to consult with other agencies for verification of circumstances. Examples may include:

- Social worker
- Fire service
- Police
- VCS prevention and support organisations
- NHS

7.6 Transition Support may cover the following (this list is not exhaustive):

- Beds/Cots (including a cot mattress)
- Bedding
- Chairs/sofas
- Tables
- White goods
- Cooking utensils and equipment
- Towels
- Floor coverings
- Curtains
- Storage or removal costs
- In very particular and limited circumstances funding to secure accommodation may be considered (see section 4.2).

Transition Support Awards

7.7 The value of Transition Support will be discretionary in relation to needs presented. A full income and expenditure calculation will be done to determine if applicant can meet all or part of the need.

7.8 Awards will be in the form of a grant, part grant/part loan or loan. Awards will be for goods or services. A cash award will only be made in exceptional circumstances. Appendix A shows the process for determining a Transition Support award.

7.9 The above thresholds are indicative and each case will be assessed on the individual's financial position at the time of application and the following guidelines apply. As a guide:

- There is a maximum loan amount of £500 per application. Any award value over £500 will be a grant.
- Loans over £250 to £500 will be repaid over a 52 week period.
- Loan under £250 will be repaid over a 26 weeks period (up to 52 weeks depending on affordability).
- A customer will not be able to exceed a total loan value of £800 over multiple applications.

7.10 A decision will be made within 5 working days. If successful, awards will be provided within 2 working days of the date the decision was made.

- **Exclusions**

- The following will be excluded from awards under the local welfare assistance scheme:
 - People with savings or investments.
 - Work/ educational/ training expenses.
 - School – uniform; sports equipment; travel; meals.
 - Court expenses.
 - Removal or storage charges 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.
 - Domestic assistance and respite care.
 - Medical services.
 - Debt to Government/ Local Authority.
 - Telephone – purchase; installation; rental; call charges.
 - Holidays.
 - Those under 16 years of age.
 - TV/Radio - licence; aerial; rental charges.
 - Car - Garaging; parking; purchase; running costs.
 - Housing costs.
 - Council Tax or Council Tax arrears.
 - Care home residents and hospital in-patients, unless the need is for a person who will be discharged as part of a planned resettlement programme
 - Persons who are members of and fully maintained by a religious order.
 - People in full-time education unless they are entitled to a qualifying benefit.
 - Prisoners who are in prison or released on temporary licence.
 - Foreign nationals with limited immigration status;
 - Foreign nationals with no recourse to public funds;
 - United Kingdom nationals who are not habitually resident in the United Kingdom.
 - A need which occurs outside of Northumberland.
 - Rent in advance.
- Notes to exclusions:
 - The exclusions above reflect the exclusions from the current scheme and where there are alternative funding sources within other publicly funded programmes.

- In the case of prisoners about to be released there would be access to a discharge grant within the individual resettlement plan, and liaison with HMP will take place. In some cases an application for Transition Support may be made in advance where the applicant is due to move into the community, and is expected to be eligible to receive a qualifying benefit, but has no eligibility to other forms of support (such as Discretionary Housing Payment).
 - With regard to foreign nationals with limited immigration status etc. they are ineligible/excluded on the grounds of their non-entitlement to current benefits.
 - A number of exclusions above may be eligible for support from DWP Social Fund 'Budgeting Loans' accessed directly from DWP and entirely separate from the Emergency Support and Transition Support described above.
- **Decision Making and Disputes**
 - Once a decision on an application has been made the applicant and/or representative will be notified in writing.
 - All decisions made on local welfare assistance applications will be final and there will be no right of appeal or review.
- **Monitoring Arrangements**
 - The Council will monitor the awards that are made through comprehensive regular information supplied by NETs to the Council.
 - In all instances where NETs has discretion to give an award these cases will closely be monitored and clearly reported (numbers of individuals or households, amount of award given, the wider circumstances and reasons for giving the award). This will allow the Council to ensure fairness and consistency and to monitor cost levels.
- **Access to the Service**
 - The service can be accessed via a free phone telephone number at the following times (with the exception of bank holidays):
Monday to Thursday – 8:30am to 17:00pm
Friday – 8:30am to 16:30pm
 - An out of hours voicemail service is available including directing callers to other potential avenues of support.
- **Communications/Publicity**
 - Communication and publicity of the service will be in line with an agreed communication programme.
- **Counter Fraud**
 - Northumberland County Council is committed to the fight against fraud in all its forms. Any applicant who attempts to, or, fraudulently claims an local welfare assistance award by falsely declaring their circumstances, providing false statements or evidence in support of their application may have committed an offence under the Theft Act 2006.
 - Where it is alleged, or suspected that such a fraud has been committed the matter will be referred for investigation. If an offence is found to have occurred, action will be taken including if appropriate criminal proceedings

- **Review of the Policy**

- This policy will be reviewed as and when required and at least on an annual basis and will take into consideration views of applicants, council staff, Members, specialist referral organisations, other referral organisations and other voluntary sector organisations with an interest in the Welfare Assistance Scheme.

Appendix A: Process for determining a grant or loan award



