



Local Crisis Assistance and Local Resettlement Assistance Policy

1. Introduction and aim of policy

From April 2013 Community Care Grants and Crisis Loans for living expenses administered by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) are being abolished. A grant is being awarded to unitary and first tier Councils for them to spend on local welfare provision. How this money is spent is for each council to determine but there is no expectation to replicate the scheme that was operated by the DWP. The DWP will still administer some types of assistance including:

- **Short term benefit advances (STBA)** which will give financial assistance to people making a new claim or who have a significant change in circumstances until their benefit is in pay.
- **Budgeting Loans** which are interest free loans to help pay for essential things such as furniture, clothes, rent or hire purchased debt. In order to be able to apply for such a loan the applicant must have been in receipt of certain benefits for at least 26 weeks or more. Applications will be unsuccessful if the applicant does not have the means to pay back the loan or if they already owe the Social Fund a specified amount.

This policy outlines how Telford & Wrekin Council will assist residents who either;

- a) experience a crisis, by granting **Local Crisis Assistance**. A crisis refers to an urgent need as a consequence of an emergency, disaster, unforeseen circumstance or an urgent need that is strikingly different from the pressures generally associated with managing on a low income. Examples include no access to essential items for healthy living (food, heating and clothing), a flood, fire or gas explosion ; or
- b) require assistance to remain or to help them establish themselves in the community by granting them **Local Resettlement Assistance**. This includes assistance for people leaving care to establish themselves in the community, assistance for people to stay in the community rather than enter care, assistance for a prisoner or young offender on home leave or release to re-adjust to life outside of prison and assistance for people to set up a home as part of a resettlement programme following a period without a settled way of life;

where the person or their immediate family do not have the funds available or access to funds to meet their basic living expenses.

The core eligibility criteria are that the applicant must:

- Be aged 16 or over.
- Be without sufficient resources to meet an urgent need that poses a serious risk to the health and safety of the applicant or their immediate family member(s).
- A resident within the Telford & Wrekin Borough. However, exceptions will be granted where the applicant requires refuge or care following abuse, harm or has an unsettled way of life.

- Legally resident in the UK

In the case of Local Resettlement Assistance the applicant must also be in receipt of one of the following benefits:

- Income Support
- Jobseekers Allowance (Income Based)
- Employment and Support Allowance (Income Related)
- Pension Credit
- Anyone who has yet to apply for the above but who is likely to qualify

If an applicant requires help to pay towards housing costs and they are in receipt of Housing Benefit then their award will be considered under the Discretionary Housing Payment scheme. Someone in receipt of Council Tax Support seeking additional help with their Council Tax can make an application for Council Tax Support Hardship assistance. If there are no funds left within either of these budgets then it may be possible to provide assistance under this policy.

Each case will be treated on its own merits within the scope of this document. All applicants will receive equal and fair treatment to take account of the Council's responsibilities under all relevant legislation, for example the Human Rights Act and Equality Act 2010.

Telford & Wrekin Council is committed to working with the local community, partnership organisations, the voluntary sector and other interested parties to facilitate this scheme.

2. Operation of the scheme

Applicants will need to complete the designated claim form. This will be available on the Council's website. In most instances the completion of an application will be made by a support worker already involved in supporting the applicant e.g. social worker, resettlement officer, or officer / volunteer of a partner organisation.

Evidence may be required to support the application but this will vary depending on the reason for the application. It may be necessary for a decision maker to visit the applicant to corroborate the application.

Telford & Wrekin Council will consider granting assistance to applicants who meet the eligibility criteria set out in this policy document. The operation of the scheme is at the Council's discretion and applicants do not have an automatic right to assistance. The scheme's budget position will be taken into consideration when making a decision on whether or what assistance can be granted.

The budget will be profiled over the year, with consideration being given in the profiling for certain peak pressure points. The Council has a limit on the funding available and profiling the available budget each month will hopefully prevent the fund running out before the end of the year. In an extreme case it may with a Revenues or Benefits Service Delivery Manager's permission be possible to grant

assistance for someone experiencing a crisis. Any budget not spent will roll into the next month.

Assistance will not be granted where another statutory body is obliged to provide assistance.

An application for Local Crisis Assistance, Local Resettlement Assistance, Discretionary Housing Payment or Council Tax Support Hardship Assistance will be considered under whichever scheme best suits the applicant's needs. For example if an applicant completes an application for Local Crisis Assistance but their needs would be best met under a Discretionary Housing Payment then their application will be considered under the Discretionary Housing Payment scheme.

Basic Principles

The following are the basic principles of the scheme:

- The assistance will be granted not loaned
- If an applicant qualifies for assistance this will be in the form of goods or service. Cash will not usually be granted. In exceptional circumstances it may be necessary to make a small cash award for an item or service which it is not possible to procure.

The following are deemed to be the essential expenditure that the scheme may cover:

- Gas or electric
- Food
- Essential white goods or the cost of repair of those goods
- Essential Furniture
- Bedding and curtains
- Crockery and cutlery
- Basic clothing i.e. a change of clothes and protective outerwear such as a coat and a pair of shoes.
- Floor coverings
- Other items or service where it is deemed that the applicant or their immediate family require the item or service to ensure their basic health or safety.

In the most exceptional circumstances, usually under the Local Resettlement Assistance section of this policy, rent in advance and removal expenses for moving home could be considered. However first due regard will be had whether the bond scheme or other agreement with the landlord could negate the need for assistance with rent in advance.

3. Local Crisis Assistance

Local Crisis Assistance may be granted in situations where a household has insufficient resources to meet an urgent need that poses an immediate and substantial risk to their health and safety.

A crisis refers to an urgent need as a consequence of an emergency, disaster, unforeseen circumstance or a pressing need that is strikingly different from the pressures generally associated with managing on a low income. A crisis could, for example, cover the following risks:

- No access to essential items necessary for healthy living (food, heating and clothing)
- The imminent risk of homelessness
- The imminent risk of children being taken into care
- Unexpected death of an immediate family member
- The breakdown of a family relationship due to cases of domestic abuse, neglect or harm
- Help to ease exceptional pressures such as exceptionally poor living conditions or the onset of, or deterioration in the health of an immediate family member
- A flood, fire and gas explosion

Issues that we will not treat as a crisis include: Minor mishaps or damage, lost or spent money, unable to access savings or capital.

Benefit disallowance or sanctions will not be treated as a crisis unless we are satisfied that the sanction has been applied through no avoidable fault of the applicant and they are at risk of one of the situations listed above.

In order to validate a request for an item / service arising from exceptional pressures, we will usually require an independent assessment, report or information from an agency working within a health or social care or support role.

Priority will be given to cases where there has been domestic violence, neglect and harm, especially involving children, to help the victim(s) source refuge where they are unlikely to be traced by a violent partner.

In cases involving abuse, neglect or harm, we will:

- Follow local adult and child safeguarding protocols.
- A decision will be based on the outcome of assessments undertaken by qualified health, social care or public protection agencies
- We will liaise with health and social care agencies to establish the appropriate pathways of support. The applicant's consent will be sought where necessary.
- We will not preclude anyone who is not currently resident in the borough if they are being placed in the borough to seek refuge.

In determining the nature and complexity of a crisis, we will consider:

- Circumstances that place the household / immediate family members under greater pressure than might generally be associated with managing on a low income;
- It does not matter whether it is a single major pressure or the cumulative effect of a number of less significant pressures, which may not be exceptional if taken individually. It is the overall impact on the household's circumstances that is important;
- The individual's / household's resources and skills for coping with the crisis;
- The point the crisis occurred and the date the application was received in relation to the number and type of associated incidences happening within this period; and

We will also take into account, whether the urgent need:

- Should be considered by another organisation or agency that has a statutory responsibility for assessing assistance in relation to the specific need;
- Can be met through the income, savings or resources that are available to the members of the household;
- Can be met by other sources of help or the possibility that some other person or body may wholly or partly meet the need;
- Would not abate without immediate support;
- Is the consequence of an act or omission for which the applicant or partner is responsible; and the applicant or partner could not have taken reasonable steps to avoid.

If the crisis has been compounded by factors such as a deterioration in health, drug and alcohol problems, unemployment, an abusive relationship and so on; we will review whether the applicant:

- Is in receipt of agency support to address the factors that underscore the crisis;
- This support will prevent the crisis from re-occurring, so the applicant is unlikely to submit another application within the next 12 months.

Core Eligibility Criteria for Local Crisis Assistance

To be considered eligible for Local Crisis Assistance applicants must satisfy ALL of the following conditions:

- Be aged 16 or over.
- Be without sufficient resources to meet an urgent need that poses a serious risk to the health and safety of the applicant or their immediate family member(s).

- A resident within the Telford & Wrekin Borough. However, exceptions will be granted where the applicant requires refuge or care following abuse, harm or has an unsettled way of life.
- Legally resident in the UK

Exclusions

The following people are excluded for support in all circumstances:

- A person in hospital or care home (independent or local authority), unless their discharge is planned to take place imminently
- A person or immediate family member that has been granted assistance under this policy on 3 separate occasions within a rolling 12 month period, commencing from the date their last application was received. Exemptions may be granted in exceptional circumstances. In such cases, the applicant will be required to attend a face to face interview.
- Prisoners and people lawfully detained.
- Members of a religious order who are fully maintained by the order.

The following people are also excluded from support, except in very exceptional circumstances:

- Full-time or part-time students not on Income Support, Income Based Job Seekers Allowance, Income Related Employment Support Allowance, Pension Credit (including payments on account) or equivalent welfare benefits – they can only receive support for expenses arising out of a disaster.
- A person from abroad who fails or would fail the habitual residence test for the purpose of welfare benefits and other entitlements.
- A person subject to benefit sanction or disallowance to their Job Seekers Allowance, Employment Support Allowance, Income Support or Pension Credit or equivalent welfare benefits.
- A person subject to immigration control by virtue of the Immigration and Asylum Act

Local Crisis Assistance **will not** help with the following;

- a need which occurs outside the United Kingdom
- **or** an educational or training need including clothing and tools (these may be granted by the school e.g. through the pupil premium)
- **or** travelling expenses to or from school
- **or** school meals for those eligible to free school meals
- **or** expenses in connection with court (legal proceedings) such as legal fees, court fees, fines, costs, damages, subsistence or travelling expenses
- **or** domestic assistance and respite care
- **or** any repair to a rented property which is the responsibility of the landlord

- **or** a medical, surgical, optical, aural or dental item or service (these needs can be provided free of charge by the National Health Service, if the applicant or their partner is in receipt of Income Support, income-based Jobseeker's Allowance, Employment and Support Allowance (income-related) or Pension Credit (which includes the guarantee credit) or replacement under Universal Credit
- **or** work related expenses
- **or** debts to government departments
- **or** investments
- **or** council tax or arrears of community charge

4. Local Resettlement Assistance

Local Resettlement Assistance is intended to help vulnerable people live independent lives to remain or become integrated within their community. The applicant can be the person requiring assistance, a member of their immediate family, or someone else the applicant or their family will be providing support for.

An application may be considered for one of four categories of assistance:

- Assistance for people leaving care to establish themselves in the community
- Assistance for people to stay in the community rather than enter care
- Assistance for a prisoner or young offender on home leave or release to re-adjust to life outside of prison
- Assistance for people to set up a home as part of a resettlement programme following a period without a settled way of life

Only those in receipt of the following incomes will be considered for Local Resettlement Assistance:

- Income Support
- Jobseekers Allowance (Income Based)
- Employment and Support Allowance (Income Related)
- Pension Credit
- Anyone who has yet to apply for the above but who is likely to qualify

Where;

- the applicant's capital and that of their immediate family is less than the amount they would need to meet their or their families basic living expenses for a period of 1 month and the applicant or their immediate family do not have the funds available to cover the cost of the items / service requested.

However, by itself, these benefits do not give an entitlement to assistance; therefore, regard to all circumstances will be taken into account.

The applicant must demonstrate that the need cannot be met by another source, and the assistance will have a substantial and immediate effect on improving their circumstances.

The applicant will be required to supply information about their circumstances and the nature of the circumstances that have led to them requiring assistance.

If necessary, applicants may be advised to seek assistance from statutory health and social care agencies, as well as community and voluntary organisations that can assist the process by providing a professional opinion on the needs of the claimant, as well as delivering support and assistance in relation to the applicant's ongoing support and welfare.

When considering a decision on an application for Local Resettlement Assistance, regard to all the circumstances for each case will be considered. In particular the following will be considered:

- If the applicant is leaving institutional or residential care and will be discharged within 6 weeks
- Both the time spent in the accommodation and the level of individual care and supervision provided will be taken into consideration when making a decision.
- A person's ability to cope with independent living may be impaired as a result of physical and mental illness or disabilities.
- Experiences of abuse and neglect
- A long period of residential or institutional care
- A long period of rough sleeping
- Whether a move to temporary accommodation or refuge will facilitate, in the long run, a settled way of life.
- Proximity of essential services relied upon by the customer and their partner to their home
- Financial advice they have sought to alleviate their situation, such as from Citizens Advice Bureau or other Welfare Rights organisation.
- Whether the customer is a former member of the armed forces who is having difficulty in finding suitable accommodation;
- Whether the customer is a returning ex-offender who is having difficulty in finding suitable accommodation;
- Whether the customer or other household member is subject to Social Services intervention;
- Whether the customer or other member of their household is undertaking care duties for relatives in the area;
- Whether the customer is a care leaver;
- Whether an award would prevent a move that would have detrimental effects on the customer and their household, for example children's schooling, health, support networks or employment;
- Whether the applicant and their household are taking long-term action to help their problems in meeting their housing costs;
- Whether the customer and their household are entitled to other welfare benefits but are not claiming them;
- Whether other family members external to the household help in any way towards the customer's financial expenditure;
- Whether the customer and their household could reduce expenditure on non-essential items;
- Will the payment of award keep the family together, will it support a young person in the transition to adult life, or will it assist in the safeguarding of a vulnerable adult or child;
- Harmful situations that place the children at risk of being taken into care;
- A young carer looking after someone with a severe illness, disability or mental health problem;

- Any reasons which make it necessary or especially desirable for the claimant to occupy the dwelling they currently reside in the view of the decision maker;
- Unless there are exceptional circumstances, applications from single people living with family members will not be awarded if they have access to other sources of help;
- Deterioration in health or medical conditions that will result in a return to care.

This list is not exhaustive

Assistance for people leaving care to establish themselves in the community

This category of need is intended to help people establish themselves in the community following a stay in institutional or residential care. Care refers to institutional or residential accommodation in which the person concerned has received care. This could include: residential care homes, rehabilitation units, hospitals or local authority care.

Assistance is also available to people if they are within 6 weeks of leaving one of the above institutions or residential accommodations.

The length of time the applicant has been in care should normally be:

- a period of three months or more, or
- a pattern of frequent or regular admission to care; linked to the nature of their presenting health problems.

The following examples are of groups of people who may need a high level of care, supervision or protection:

- Frail elderly or disabled people who have restricted mobility
- People who have difficulty performing personal care tasks
- People with acute learning disabilities
- People with a physical impairment, including those with sensory impairments
- People with diagnosed mental health and / or neurological problems that correspond to the DSM (IV) & ICD classification system
- Chronically sick and terminally ill people
- People recovering from drug and alcohol addictions
- Young people leaving care
- Young people who have no parents or are unable to live with their parents because they are at risk of abuse, harm or neglect
- Rough sleepers

This list is not exhaustive.

In the case of children and young people leaving care, we will liaise with health and social care agencies to ensure they are able to establish themselves safely and

securely in the community to prevent the risk of homelessness, exploitation and harm. Assistance may be granted for children and young people who: have left care in the last 12 months; or are in the process of setting up a new home, if age appropriate.

Applicants will be required to demonstrate what other broader support will be in place to help the person concerned to:

- Make the immediate transition from care to the community;
- Remain in the community and not return to care; and

such transition arrangements should involve the person concerned and gain their consent.

Planned care should match the immediate and ongoing needs of the individual; verified by a senior health care practitioner or a statutory authority, such as a G.P, specialist physician, psychiatrist, family nurse or social services.

We will assess whether broader areas of community care is planned, such as assistance from support workers and informal care givers. In doing so, we will evaluate, based on the advice given by lead professionals, whether the nominated care givers are reliable, responsible and appropriately matched to the person's care needs, especially if a child or young person is rejoining the household after a period in care.

Being in receipt of a 'personal budget' for adult social care or disability related benefits does not automatically qualify someone for assistance.

Each application will be assessed on its own merits in the context of the individuals; symptoms, level of functioning; finances, family and community resources.

If the person concerned is suffering from a deteriorating medical condition, a serious illness or is exposed to a harmful situation that will inevitably lead to return to care; granting Local Resettlement Assistance award may delay such a decision, and for this reason, an award may be refused. Making a decision to refuse an application in such cases will be based on the recommendation of a professional such as a Social Worker.

Assistance for people to stay in the community rather than enter care

This category of need is designed to support someone to live independently, rather than go into institutional or residential accommodation, such as a residential care home, hospital, rehabilitation units or local authority care. Prisoners or young offenders on release or home leave cannot apply for this category [see section "Assistance for a prisoner or young offender on home leave or release to re-adjust to life outside of prison"].

The risk of the person being taken into care has to be substantial – supported by clear evidence verified by a statutory authority or lead health or social care practitioner to substantiate;

- the threat of care is immediate or imminent; and
- there is a direct link between the threat of care and the need in question

The person concerned should require a significant and substantial amount of care or supervision because they;

- cannot adequately look after themselves or others;
- would be a danger to themselves or others;
- are at risk of harm or abuse

In order to validate a care need, we will require verification from professional agencies working within a health or social care role.

In considering applications for this need, we will liaise with health and social care agencies to assess:

- If the person requires a significant and substantial amount of care;
- The items applied for are sufficiently linked to their care needs;
- The items applied for, together with the planned care, will help the person remain in their home or lessen the risk of going into care;
- The extent to which their existing or planned accommodation is not suited to the needs of the applicant or immediate family, by the very fact that it presents a risk to their health and safety;
- Whether broader support is in place to prevent the person from entering care;
- The level, length and frequency of this support in relation to the person's health and ongoing needs; and
- Whether support includes other areas of community care, such as assistance from support workers and informal care givers. This may include activities that meet: safety, security, self-esteem and personal growth needs.
- Planned care will prevent the risk of homelessness, exploitation or harm

If the person concerned is suffering from a deteriorating medical condition, an illness or a harmful situation that will inevitably lead them to going into care and granting Local Resettlement Assistance will delay such a decision then assistance may be refused. Making a decision to refuse an application in such cases will be based on the recommendation of a professional such as a Social Worker.

Being in receipt of a 'personal budget' for adult social care or disability related benefits does not automatically qualify someone for assistance. Each application will be assessed on its own merits in the context of the individual's; symptoms, level of functioning; finances, family and community resources.

Assistance for a prisoner or young offender on home leave or release to re-adjust to life outside of prison

This category of need is designed to support prisoners and young offenders, leaving prison, or on home leave, adjust to life outside of prison through the provision of essential items.

One of the intentions of this category is to support the individual, immediately after their release, to prevent the likelihood of re-offending and the risk of harm.

An application can be made 6 weeks in advance of the person's release date.

If the person is on temporary release, the person caring for the prisoner or young offender must make the application.

We will assess whether the requested item / service will help the person adjust to life outside of prison and prevent the risk of re-offending or harm.

If the person is being released / discharged as part of a resettlement regime, a transition plan should be in place which is a series of things that are intended to help the person make the transition from prison to community life. That is, a plan to help the person deal with the problems they may face after being released. This plan may be provided by the Prison Service, the Probation Service or other agency or charity tasked with providing the plan.

A transition plan should take into account the person's immediate and ongoing support needs, such as: employment, accommodation, development of family and community ties; finance, drug and alcohol addictions, mental and physical health; childcare and so on. Moreover, it should be based on agreed multi agency working to ensure there will be an ongoing risk assessment designed to support the person's reintegration back into the community.

In addition to a transition plan, we will review whether the person concerned has made reasonable endeavours to prepare for life outside of prison. In particular, the person has:

- Applied for a discharge grant, if eligible
- Applied for a travel warrant to pay for their travel back home or anywhere else they are going to settle down
- Set up an appointment with their local benefit office to apply for benefits
- Sought help whilst in prison, especially if they will be homeless on release e.g. made contact with the prison's resettlement team
- Participated in any pre-release courses or training that will support their adjustment to life outside of prison
- Received suitable clothing from the prison on their discharge
- Notified the police of their name and address, if convicted of certain sex and violent offences.

We will take into account whether the applicant is subject to a Licence which includes conditions that will support prospects of effective resettlement and/or contribute to public protection.

Multi agency protection arrangements (MAPPA) must be in place to manage and reduce the risk presented by sexual and violent offenders.

Telford & Wrekin Council reserves the right to reject applications where it becomes clear that the planned resettlement or temporary release does not have sufficient arrangements in place to reduce the likelihood of re-offending and risk of harm to the public. This information is likely to be provided by a professional working with the offender e.g. Prison Service or Probation Service. Applications will be assessed in accordance with the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act.

Assistance for people to set up a home as part of a resettlement programme following a period without a settled way of life

This assistance is intended to help people establish a settled way of life following a period of continuous instability.

The fact that someone has lacked accommodation does not necessarily constitute an unsettled way of life. For instance, an applicant evicted from a longstanding tenancy who, after staying with their relatives for a month, obtains a new tenancy will not satisfy requirements under this category.

Assistance will only be considered if the application forms part of a planned resettlement programme. The programme may be provided by the Council or other agency or charity providing support to the person. This programme must include:

- Help to set up a new home or secure stable accommodation; and
- Activities / actions designed to help the applicant settle in the community

If the requested item(s) / service(s) are for the purpose of setting up a new home, the home need not be permanent. For instance, applicants may satisfy requirement if they are moving into assured short hold tenancies, temporary accommodation or a refuge that will eventually lead to a settled way of life. In such instances there will be an expectation that the applicant will take any items granted with them when they move into more permanent accommodation.

The resettlement programme should show there is a plan: a series of things that are intended to help the person resettle in other ways, such as employment, budgeting, guidance on running a home and help to address health problems or behaviour that may have caused and maintained an unsettled way of life.

Importantly, this planned support must go beyond accommodation needs (i.e. setting up a new home): it must be specific to the individual; it should engage them actively; and entail multi-agency working.

To determine whether an applicant has an unsettled way of life, a range of circumstances will be considered, in particular:

- When the applicant last lived in settled accommodation;
- The different places they have stayed;
- The types of accommodation involved;
- The periods spent in each place;
- The reasons for leaving; and
- Factors that may have caused and maintained an unsettled way of life.

If the unsettled way of life is a consequence of an act or omission to which the applicant is responsible for or could have taken steps to avoid, assistance will not be made, unless there are exceptional circumstances for doing so.

An unsettled way of life, for example, may refer to the following situations;

- a rough sleeper
- a person using a night shelter, temporary accommodation or a hostel over a prolonged period of time.
- victim(s) of domestic abuse seeking refuge

However, this does not mean that everyone who is staying in a hostel or temporary accommodation is without a settled way of life. Each case will be considered on its own merits.

Core Eligibility Criteria for Local Resettlement Assistance

To be considered eligible for Local Resettlement Assistance applicants must satisfy ALL of the following conditions:

- Be aged 16 or over.
- Be without sufficient resources to meet an urgent need that poses a serious risk to the health and safety of the applicant or their immediate family member(s).
- A resident within the Telford & Wrekin Borough. However, exceptions will be granted where the applicant requires refuge or care following abuse, harm or has an unsettled way of life.
- Legally resident in the UK

The applicant must also be in receipt of one of the following benefits:

- Income Support
- Jobseekers Allowance (Income Based)
- Employment and Support Allowance (Income Related)
- Pension Credit
- Anyone who has yet to apply for the above but who is likely to qualify

Where;

- the applicant's capital and that of their immediate family is less than the amount they would need to meet their or their families basic living expenses for a period of 1 month and the applicant or their immediate family do not have the funds available to cover the cost of the items / service requested.

If an applicant requires help to set up a new home, they must be at the start or in the process of doing so. No assistance will be granted for applicants that have completed this process.

In determining whether an applicant is in the process of setting up a home, we will take into account:

- how long the applicant has been living in the property;
- the furniture and equipment they have in their home; and
- how they are managing without the items they lack

Exclusions

The following people are excluded from assistance in all circumstances:

- A person in hospital or care home (independent or local authority), unless their discharge is planned to take place imminently
- A person moving into care settings such as nursing and residential homes.
- A person subject to immigration control by virtue of the Immigration and Asylum Act as they are not able to claim benefits. This may be because they haven't got permission to enter or remain in the UK, only have permission to enter or remain in the UK if they don't claim benefits or use other public services or were given permission to enter or remain in the UK because someone has formally agreed to support them.
- A person or immediate family member that has been granted assistance under this policy on 3 separate occasions within a rolling 12 month period, commencing from the date their last application was received. Exemptions may be granted in exceptional circumstances. In such cases, the applicant will be required to attend a face to face interview.
- Prisoners and people lawfully detained with the exception of those due to be released imminently and who fall under the criteria for "Assistance for a prisoner or young offender on home leave or release to re-adjust to life outside of prison".
- Members of a religious order who are fully maintained by the order.

The following people are also excluded from assistance, except in very exceptional circumstances:

- A person from abroad who fails or would fail the habitual residence test for the purpose of welfare benefits and other entitlements.

- A person subject to benefit sanction or disallowance to their Job Seekers Allowance, Employment Support Allowance, Income Support or Pension Credit or equivalent welfare benefits.
- Single people living with family members who are deemed to have access to other sources of help.

Local Resettlement Assistance **will not** help with the following;

- a need which occurs outside the United Kingdom
- **or** an educational or training need including clothing and tools (these may be granted by the school e.g. through the pupil premium)
- **or** travelling expenses to or from school
- **or** school meals for those eligible to free school meals
- **or** expenses in connection with court (legal proceedings) such as legal fees, court fees, fines, costs, damages, subsistence or travelling expenses
- **or** domestic assistance and respite care
- **or** any repair to a rented property which is the responsibility of the landlord
- **or** a medical, surgical, optical, aural or dental item or service (these needs can be provided free of charge by the National Health Service, if the applicant or their partner is in receipt of Income Support, income-based Jobseeker's Allowance, Employment and Support Allowance (income-related) or Pension Credit (which includes the guarantee credit) or replacement under Universal Credit
- **or** work related expenses
- **or** debts to government departments
- **or** investments
- **or** council tax or arrears of community charge

5. Decision Making

Whilst recognising the need for individual consideration of the circumstances of each case, consistency is also important. Each case needs to be looked at on its own merits but all customers need to be treated equitably and fairly when the scheme is administered.

Requests for Further Information

Although some decisions may be able to be made based on the information provided within the application, it may be necessary to request further information to enable the decision maker to reach a decision. Extra information may be requested by:

- Telephone to verify information provided, clarify details of the crisis or care need; review what has caused the urgent need and to discuss other types of support that may be appropriate to the specific need.
- Interview to verify the same information as would be requested during a telephone call. Sometimes however it is easier to speak with the applicant face to face.
- Visit – it may be necessary for a visiting officer to visit the applicant in their home to gather information or assess their requirements.
- Liaising with advocacy services, agencies and statutory authorities – through working with the applicant these bodies may have additional information on the applicant's circumstances and the impact on the applicant's health and safety the requested item or service will have. It may also be necessary to seek additional advice or guidance from appropriate bodies on the other options that may be available to the applicant to alleviate their circumstances.
- In writing – when dealing with urgent requests it is unlikely that requests for additional information will be made in writing, however on occasions it may be deemed appropriate to request information in writing. An example may be a non-urgent Local Resettlement Assistance where the person is not yet in a position to move back into the community or where all other methods of communication have not elicited a response.

The applicant will need to provide information within a tight time limit due to the urgent need for a decision to be made. In most instances an applicant for Local Crisis Assistance will need to provide information within 1 working day of any request. In most instances for Local Resettlement Assistance the applicant will need to provide information within two weeks of the request. The time limit can be adjusted according to the circumstances of the application. If a person fails to provide the necessary information then the application will be rejected.

Rejection of Application

On reviewing the applicant's circumstances, case details and eligibility; a decision maker may reject an application on the basis:

- The urgent need can be met by other sources of help or the applicant has failed to demonstrate how they have sought to address their need through other types of assistance;
- The applicant is deemed to have sufficient resources to meet the urgent need;
- Following the date the crisis or care need had arisen, the circumstances of the applicant or their family members' have changed in such a way that they no longer satisfy the criteria for assistance;
- The applicant has been granted assistance on 3 separate occasions within a rolling 12 month period, commencing from the date their last application was received. Exemptions may be granted;
- The applicant is deemed to not meet the considerations for assistance set out in this policy;
- The item(s) or service(s) applied for are ineligible as set out in sections 3 and 4;
- The application is deemed to be fraudulent [see section 8];
- Insufficient information is provided to verify the applicant's need, circumstances or eligibility;
- The operation of the scheme is at the Council's discretion and applicants do not have an automatic right to assistance.

Making Decisions

In reaching a decision a decision maker may decide that:

- An application is rejected.
- Partial assistance is granted as it is deemed that not all of the requested items or services will directly reduce the health and safety risks associated with the applicant's circumstances.
- Having regard to all the applicant's circumstances a decision maker may decide that alternative item(s) or service would best suit their needs to reduce the health and safety risks with the circumstances they find themselves in. Such decisions will usually be made after consultation with any support worker that is assisting the applicant.
- Full assistance is granted i.e. the items or services requested are granted in full.
- Not all qualifying applications can be paid as this scheme has a cash limited budget. A decision will take account of monthly budget positions, demand patterns and resource levels.

Telford & Wrekin Council reserves the right to reject applications at any stage of the assessment process.

Timescales for decision making

It will be necessary to make decisions on Local Crisis Assistance applications in most cases within 24 hours, for example if the applicant is in need of food or heating. Some applications are less urgent e.g. a request for washing machine or cooker. For

these requests decisions will be made within 3 working days or as soon as is practically possible. In many instances the decision on Local Resettlement Assistance applications is less urgent as usually there is notice of the person returning to the community, decisions in these cases will where possible be made within 2 weeks of the application or as soon as is practically possible. In some instances a more urgent decision will need to be made e.g. if someone has to move quickly due to suffering domestic violence.

Most applications can wait until the next working day to be determined. However there may be emergencies where a decision is required out of office hours. Such requests will be received by the Council's out of hours emergency duty team. Where it is deemed that a request cannot wait until the next working day the case will be referred to a decision maker on an out of hours rota.

6. Granting of Assistance

Assistance may be in the form of:

- A food parcel, toiletries and baby goods provided by the Crisis Network
- Items of essential furniture. Where the appropriate item(s) are available they will be sourced from local community recycling schemes for which the Council will recompense the scheme for the value of the goods. Where it is not possible to purchase used goods the Council will look to purchase a new item. The Council will arrange for the item to be delivered.
- Essential white goods which where there is an appropriate item available will be sourced from local community recycling schemes for which the Council will recompense the scheme for the value of the goods. Where it is not possible to purchase second hand goods the Council will look to purchase a new item. The Council will arrange for the goods to be delivered, installed and any existing item which is being replaced to be removed to be repaired or recycled.
- A pre-paid voucher which can be used at any PayPoint facility to credit the applicant's gas or electricity key, card or account. The voucher will only be able to be redeemed against the applicant's specific key, card or account.

No cash awards will be made unless a grant is awarded under unusual circumstances where it is not possible to procure the item or service. If a cash award is to be made this will either be made directly into an appropriate bank account or by way of a PayPoint voucher which the applicant can cash at a local PayPoint terminal.

Depending on the applicant's circumstances assistance may be granted to:

- The applicant
- Their partner or immediate family member acting as an appointee
- An advocate service or statutory authority acting on behalf of the applicant.

- Other third party where the applicant has an illness or disability that impairs their ability to make a transaction or receive a delivery for the agreed item / service

A decision on assistance being granted may be conditional upon the applicant agreeing or meeting certain requirements to prevent the risks associated with the crisis or the support need reoccurring. For example, if an unsettled way of life has been mediated by drug and alcohol addiction, the applicant will be required to seek treatment / therapies as advised by specialist health workers.

Should an applicant be unsuccessful, they can ask for their decision to be reviewed if there is reasonable grounds to do so [see section 10].

7. Notification

Applicants will be notified of their decision either in writing (including e-mail) or via telephone (including text message). In some cases a decision may be made face to face.

The reasons for a decision will be explained as well as the options available to the applicant.

8. Fraud

Telford & Wrekin Council is committed to the fight against fraud in all its forms. An applicant who tries to fraudulently claim a grant by falsely declaring their circumstances, providing a false statement or evidence in support of their application, may have committed an offence under the Fraud Act 2006. Where it is alleged, or the authority suspects that such a fraud may have been committed, the matter will be investigated and if fraud is found to have occurred, action will be taken including, if appropriate, criminal proceedings.

9. Officer Roles

Decision Maker (Discretionary Awards Officer or equivalent) – will gather all necessary information they deem necessary to make a decision. Where further information is required the decision maker will telephone, arrange a meeting or visit the applicants in their home. Or where appropriate they will contact any third party who may be able to provide additional information.

The decision maker will consider all the information available and with regard to the qualifying criteria and factors to consider will decide whether assistance can be granted.

The decision maker will notify the applicant or their representative of their decision and will offer advice on any other steps the applicant can take to ease their circumstance or other support available. The decision maker where necessary will refer the applicant to other agencies or departments who can provide support and assistance.

The Benefit Service Delivery Manager has the authority to delegate decision making powers to another suitably experienced officer if there should be a need.

Review Officer – any appeals received will be decided by the Discretionary Awards Team Leader, or where they have made the original decision the Benefit Welfare & Assurance Group Manager will undertake the review.

The Benefit Service Delivery Manager has the authority to delegate this function to another suitably experienced officer if there should be a need.

10. Reviews and Appeals

Local Crisis Assistance and Local Resettlement Assistance are discretionary awards however an applicant who is dissatisfied with a decision regarding one of these awards may apply for it to be reviewed. Applications for a review must be in writing and contain reasons for the application and be received within 14 days of being notified of the original decision.

A reviewing officer will consider the request for a review. It may be necessary to speak to the applicant or their representative either via the telephone or face to face.

The outcome of the review will be notified in writing.

Should the applicant remain dissatisfied with the outcome of the review, they have the right to contact the Local Authority Ombudsman.

11. Publicity

Details of the scheme and the application will be included on the Council's website. The Council will work with relevant interested parties who work with people who are most likely to require assistance from the scheme. The Revenues and Benefits Service will seek the co-operation of various service areas across the Council and partner organisations including social services, family and cohesion services, housing associations, the probation service and voluntary sector organisations.