



WOKINGHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL

A Meeting of an **INDIVIDUAL EXECUTIVE MEMBER DECISION** will be held in the Council Chamber - Civic Offices, Shute End, Wokingham RG40 1BN on **TUESDAY 11 MAY 2021 AT 10.40 AM**

Susan Parsonage
Chief Executive
Published on 30 April 2021

Note: Due to the ongoing Coronavirus pandemic, non-Committee Members and members of the public will not be able to attend this meeting in person. If you wish to participate in this meeting in line with the Council's Constitution, please contact Democratic Services. The meeting can be watched live using the following link:
<https://youtu.be/pLeHfDYhMWA>

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WOKINGHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL

Our Vision

A great place to live, learn, work and grow and a great place to do business

Enriching Lives

- Champion outstanding education and enable our children and young people to achieve their full potential, regardless of their background.
- Support our residents to lead happy, healthy lives and provide access to good leisure facilities to complement an active lifestyle.
- Engage and involve our communities through arts and culture and create a sense of identity which people feel part of.
- Support growth in our local economy and help to build business.

Safe, Strong, Communities

- Protect and safeguard our children, young and vulnerable people.
- Offer quality care and support, at the right time, to prevent the need for long term care.
- Nurture communities and help them to thrive.
- Ensure our borough and communities remain safe for all.

A Clean and Green Borough

- Do all we can to become carbon neutral and sustainable for the future.
- Protect our borough, keep it clean and enhance our green areas.
- Reduce our waste, improve biodiversity and increase recycling.
- Connect our parks and open spaces with green cycleways.

Right Homes, Right Places

- Offer quality, affordable, sustainable homes fit for the future.
- Build our fair share of housing with the right infrastructure to support and enable our borough to grow.
- Protect our unique places and preserve our natural environment.
- Help with your housing needs and support people to live independently in their own homes.

Keeping the Borough Moving

- Maintain and improve our roads, footpaths and cycleways.
- Tackle traffic congestion, minimise delays and disruptions.
- Enable safe and sustainable travel around the borough with good transport infrastructure.
- Promote healthy alternative travel options and support our partners to offer affordable, accessible public transport with good network links.

Changing the Way We Work for You

- Be relentlessly customer focussed.
- Work with our partners to provide efficient, effective, joined up services which are focussed around you.
- Communicate better with you, owning issues, updating on progress and responding appropriately as well as promoting what is happening in our Borough.
- Drive innovative digital ways of working that will connect our communities, businesses and customers to our services in a way that suits their needs.

For consideration by

John Kaiser, Executive Member for Finance and Housing

Officers Present

Nicky Thomas, Service Manager - Assessments

Callum Wernham, Democratic & Electoral Services Specialist

IMD NO.	WARD	SUBJECT	
IMD 2021/15	None Specific	LOCAL WELFARE PROVISION POLICY	5 - 22

CONTACT OFFICER

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Agenda Item IMD15

INDIVIDUAL EXECUTIVE MEMBER DECISION

REFERENCE IMD: IMD 2021/15

TITLE	Local Welfare Provision Policy
DECISION TO BE MADE BY	Executive Member for Finance and Housing - John Kaiser
DATE, MEETING ROOM and TIME	11 May 2021 Council Chamber at 10.40am (Please see front sheet for attendance details)
WARD	None Specific;
DIRECTOR / KEY OFFICER	Deputy Chief Executive - Graham Ebers

PURPOSE OF REPORT (Inc Strategic Outcomes)

Wokingham Borough Council (the Council) considers that it is in the best interests of the community to run a Local Welfare Provision (LWP) scheme. The scheme will be reviewed annually to provide the Council with an opportunity to understand, measure, respond to local demand and to make any appropriate changes.

This scheme will be known as the Local Welfare Provision (LWP) scheme and will apply from the date of adoption, until changed.

Protecting the vulnerable residents of Wokingham Borough forms part of the duties and responsibilities of various council (and partner) teams. With the emergency financial provision through LWP we aim to further assist vulnerable people who may be in crisis or an emergency where financial assistance would help. It recognises that in addition to the wide spectrum of support that is available to its residents, the Council needs to be flexible in order to mitigate unforeseen circumstances that will place additional pressure on residents and the services they receive.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Executive Member for Finance and Housing:

- 1) Approve the Policy amendments to be implemented from 11th May 2021. Amendments are to financial year, job title and confirmation of funding details;
- 2) Agrees with the proposal that going forward the policy only needs formal sign off by Executive Member should there be any fundamental changes to the policy or award criteria, excluding those described above.

SUMMARY OF REPORT

The Council will consider making a LWP award to applicants who meet the qualifying criteria, as specified in this policy, providing sufficient funding for this purpose is available at the time of the Council's decision. All applications will be considered on their individual merits.

The features of the Council's LWP scheme are that:

- it is discretionary,
- an applicant does not have a statutory right to a payment,
- the total expenditure in any one year resulting from awards under this scheme will not exceed the value of the funding decided by Wokingham Borough Council,
- the operation of the scheme is for the Council to determine,
- the Council may choose to vary the way in which funds are allocated according to community needs and available funds,
- other than the normal appeal against the application of a discretionary function by Judicial Review, there is no right to a statutory appeal of any application decision. In the interest of fairness the Council will operate an internal review procedure for appeals in a non-discriminatory way.

The purpose of this policy is to detail the Council's high-level objectives in respect of Local Welfare Provision and detail how the Council will operate the scheme, including the factors that will be taken into account when considering if a Local Welfare Provision award can be made. Each case will be treated strictly on its merits and all applicants will be treated equally and fairly when the scheme is administered.

A LWP award will normally be an urgent, one-off provision used as a short-term fix to prevent a long-term problem, and will seek to:

- ease severe financial pressure on families in certain situations,
- give flexible financial help to those in genuine need,
- prevent serious risk to the health, well-being or safety of the borough's most vulnerable and financially excluded residents,
- help those without the necessary means. This could include assistance to those coming into the Borough from care or prison, or those already here, to remain in their community,
- signposting to the best organisation to assist with needs.

The purpose of this revised Policy is to update financial year, Executive Member title, job titles and funding details. The criteria and claims process remain unchanged from previously agreed policy.

Background

The Welfare Reform Act 2012 (the Act) ended the provision of Community Care Grants and Crisis Loans under the Discretionary Social Fund for living expenses provided by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP).

Since 1st April 2013, funding was transferred from the DWP to Local Authorities to provide locally designed and administered assistance to vulnerable people.

There is no statutory duty requiring local authorities to deliver a specific scheme for administering this funding. Between 2013 and 2016, scheme funding was provided by allocations granted by Government for this specific purpose. From 1st April 2016, the scheme is cash-limited to the amount of funding provided by Wokingham Borough Council from its general funds. It does not replace the support mechanisms and budgets that exist elsewhere within local authorities. The funding allocated for 2021/22 is £23,170.

This policy has been designed with consideration of The Human Rights Act 1998 and The Equality Act 2010

The purpose of this policy is to detail the Council's high-level objectives in respect of Local Welfare Provision and detail how the Council will operate the scheme, including the factors that will be taken into account when considering if a Local Welfare Provision award can be made. Each case will be treated strictly on its merits and all applicants will be treated equally and fairly when the scheme is administered.

Business Case (including Analysis of Issues)

The Council considers that it is in the best interests of the community to run a Local Welfare Provision (LWP) scheme to ensure there is some assistance to our most vulnerable residents.

Protecting our vulnerable residents forms part of the duties and responsibilities of various departments and partners. With the emergency financial provision through LWP we aim to further assist vulnerable people who may be in crisis or an emergency situation where financial assistance would help. It recognises that in addition to the wide spectrum of support that is available to its residents, the Council needs to be flexible in order to mitigate unforeseen circumstances that will place additional pressure on residents and the services they receive.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

The Council faces severe funding pressures, particularly in the face of the COVID-19 crisis. It is therefore imperative that Council resources are focused on the vulnerable and on its highest priorities.

	How much will it Cost/ (Save)	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1)	The council decided to provide funds to run its scheme from general funds. For 2021/22 £23,170 was approved	Yes. No further awards will be made if funding is exhausted in year	Revenue
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	Not yet known	WBC will need to decide if it wishes to operate a LWP scheme for 22/23 and if so, fund accordingly	Revenue
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	Not yet known	WBC will need to decide if it wishes to operate a LWP scheme for 23/24 and if so, fund accordingly	Revenue

Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision
None

Cross-Council Implications
During the initial development of this Policy, other Council service areas were consulted to ensure that this scheme was complimentary to but did not overlap with any similar provision in those service areas. The suggested amendments do not change that position

Public Sector Equality Duty
Due regard has been given to WBC's duties under the Equality Act 2010

SUMMARY OF CONSULTATION RESPONSES	
Director – Resources and Assets	No major changes to policy that required consultation. Director and Assistant Director have reviewed policy changes and had the opportunity to comment on.
Monitoring Officer	Consulted with MO, nothing to add
Leader of the Council	Email sent 13 th April 2021

Reasons for considering the report in Part 2
N/A

List of Background Papers
Revised WBC Local Welfare Provision Policy

Contact Nicky Thomas	Service Income and Assessments, Resources & Assets
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**WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**LOCAL WELFARE PROVISION
POLICY 2021-2022**

Version Control

Version	Date	Author	Comments
1	13 th December 2012	Nicky Thomas Mark Redfearn	First Full Draft
	24 th February 2013	Nicky Thomas	Final
Final	22 nd March 2013		Agreed by Anthony Pollock
2	16 th October 2013	Nicky Thomas	Revisions draft
3	18 th February 2014	Nicky Thomas/ Kevin Mercer	
2 nd Final	29 th August 2014		Agreed by Anthony Pollock
	24 th February 2016	Nicky Thomas/ Barbara Blake	Revisions Draft
3 rd Final	22 nd April 2016	Nicky Thomas/ Barbara Blake	Agreed by Anthony Pollock
4	13 th January 2017	Nicky Thomas/ Barbara Blake	Revisions Draft
5	3 rd August 2017	Nicky Thomas/ Barbara Blake	Agreed by Oliver Whittle
6	9 th March 2018	Barbara Blake	Revisions draft
7	16 th March 2018	Andrew Kupusarevic	Final- submitted for approval
8	23 rd March 2018	Andrew Kupusarevic	Final version agreed via delegated powers
9	20 th February 2019	Nicky Thomas	Revisions Draft
10	29 th March 2019	Nicky Thomas	Agreed by Anthony Pollock
11	23 rd January 2020	Nicky Thomas	Revisions Draft
12	4 th June 2020	Nicky Thomas	Final Version agreed by John Kaiser
13	23 rd March 2021	Nicky Thomas	Revisions such as dates, funding and job titles

14	11 th May 2021	Nicky Thomas	Final Version agreed by John Kaiser
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Local Welfare Provision

1. Introduction

National Picture

The Welfare Reform Act 2012 (the Act) ended the provision of Community Care Grants and Crisis Loans under the Discretionary Social Fund for living expenses provided by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP).

Since 1st April 2013, funding was transferred from the DWP to Local Authorities to provide locally designed and administered assistance to vulnerable people.

There is no statutory duty requiring local authorities to deliver a specific scheme for administering this funding. Between 2013 and 2016, scheme funding was provided by allocations granted by Government for this specific purpose. From 1st April 2016, the scheme is cash-limited to the amount of funding provided by Wokingham Borough Council from its general funds. It doesn't replace the support mechanisms and budgets that exist elsewhere within local authorities. The funding allocated for 2021/2022 is £23,170.

This policy has been designed with consideration of The Human Rights Act 1998 and The Equality Act 2010

Local Picture

Wokingham Borough Council (the Council) considers that it is in the best interests of the community to run a scheme. The scheme will be reviewed annually to provide the Council with an opportunity to understand, measure and respond to local demand.

This scheme will be known as the Local Welfare Provision (LWP) scheme and will apply from the date of adoption, until changed.

The purpose of this policy is to detail the Council's high-level objectives in respect of Local Welfare Provision and detail how the Council will operate the scheme, including the factors that will be taken into account when considering if a Local Welfare Provision award can be made. Each case will be treated strictly on its merits and all applicants will be treated equally and fairly when the scheme is administered.

The delivery of the LWP scheme is purely at the Council's discretion. The scheme set out in the following paper shall be known as the Local Welfare Provision Policy and will apply from 11th May 2021 onwards, until changed.

The responsibility for Local Welfare Provision is contained within the portfolio of the Executive Member for Finance and Housing.

2. Statement of Objectives

Protecting the vulnerable residents of Wokingham Borough forms part of the duties and responsibilities of various council (and partner) teams. With the emergency financial provision through LWP we aim to further assist vulnerable people who may be in crisis or an emergency where financial assistance would help. It recognises that in addition to the wide spectrum of support that is available to its residents, the Council needs to be flexible in order to mitigate unforeseen circumstances that will place additional pressure on residents and the services they receive.

The LWP scheme is to stop unforeseen issues escalating into more serious or systemic problems that require a more sustained and intensive response.

A LWP award will normally be an urgent, one-off provision used as a short-term fix to prevent a long-term problem, and we will seek to:

- ease severe financial pressure on families in certain situations,
- give flexible financial help to those in genuine need,
- prevent serious risk to the health, well-being or safety of the borough's most vulnerable and financially excluded residents,
- help those without the necessary means. This could include assistance to those coming into the Borough from care or prison, or those already here, to remain in their community,
- signposting to the best organisation to assist with needs.

In recognition of the current economic situation due to the COVID 19 pandemic, where an increase in claims and pressure on the fund may occur, the council will aim to be as flexible as possible while still adhering to this policy.

3. Policy

3.1. The Local Welfare Provision Scheme

The Council will consider making a LWP award to applicants who meet the qualifying criteria, as specified in this policy, providing sufficient funding for this purpose is available at the time of the Council's decision. All applications will be considered on their individual merits.

The features of the Council's LWP scheme are that:

- it is discretionary,
- an applicant does not have a statutory right to a payment or fulfilment,
- the total expenditure in any one year resulting from awards under this scheme will not exceed the value of the funding decided by Wokingham Borough Council,
- the operation of the scheme is for the Council to determine,
- the Council may choose to vary the way in which funds are allocated according to community needs and available funds,
- it supports the aims of the Council to be carbon neutral by 2030,
- in the interests of fairness the Council will operate an internal review procedure for appeals in a non-discriminatory way.

3.2. Applying for a Local Welfare Provision Award

- The scheme will be advertised on the Council's website. Consideration will be given to undertaking wider publicity through other council publications and through communications with other Council Services and 3rd Sector Providers,
- An application for a LWP award must be made in a way that is acceptable to the Council,

- The application must be made by the person to whom it relates (the applicant) but they can ask a council officer or another person to complete it on their behalf. Applications can also be made by 3rd Sector Providers,
- Applications from people not meeting the minimum eligibility criteria (detailed below) will not be considered,
- The Council may request any reasonable evidence in support of an application for a LWP award. The applicant will be asked to provide the evidence and it must be provided within a timely manner of the request although this will be extended in appropriate circumstances. During the COVID 19 pandemic there may be a need for relaxation on certain evidence and this will be considered on a case- by case- basis,
- The Council reserves the right to verify any information or evidence that the applicant supplies, in appropriate circumstances, with other Wokingham Borough Council departments, government agencies and external organisations or individuals. We may also use the information for the detection/prevention of fraud. This right will be applied in a non-discriminatory way,
- If the applicant is unable to, or does not provide the required evidence (in relation to the eligibility criteria), in the time and manner requested, we may treat the application as withdrawn by the applicant and we will then be under no obligation to make a decision on the application,
- The Council is under no duty to make a LWP award. Where funds or support are available from another source, we will signpost the applicant to those sources rather than make a LWP award as appropriate,
- The Council will aim to decide applications for emergency assistance within one working day and all other applications within 10 working days, excluding any days that it takes for an applicant to provide any evidence.

3.3. Eligibility Criteria

An application will only be considered where the applicant satisfies each of the following 8 criteria and at least criterion A or B. References to Wokingham Borough mean the area within the Council's boundary. The applicant must:

- be aged 16 or over,
- be able to demonstrate a settled residence in Wokingham Borough or have been placed in housing outside the area by the Council or, in the case of someone leaving prison or care, be about to move into Wokingham Borough or, in the case of a

homeless applicant, be able to demonstrate their last fixed residence was within the Wokingham Borough area,

- not have savings that can be relied upon to meet the need to which they are presenting,
- not be excluded from applying for public funds on the basis of immigration status,
- not have received a LWP award in the past 6 months, unless they can demonstrate, in the view of the Council, significant exceptional need,
- not have been refused a LWP award for the same need in the past 6 months, unless they can, in the view of the Council, demonstrate exceptional circumstances,
- be without sufficient resources which would in turn cause serious risk to their own, or their family's health, safety or wellbeing,
- not have received assistance for the requested funding or support from other public funds,

AND

A. must require essential assistance to become established, or to remain, in the community,

or

B. must require essential assistance with an emergency (e.g. illness/emergency travel costs).

These criteria can only be set aside if it is in the best interest of the council and its residents to do so. For example, if the cost of paying an LWP award is less than the cost associated with alternatives that must be met by council funds such as homelessness. Only to be done with the agreement of the Team Manager or above.

3.4. Awarding Local Welfare Provision

In deciding whether to make a LWP award we will have regard to the applicant's circumstances including:

- any sources of credit such as cash cards, store cards, credit cards, cheque cards, cheque accounts, overdraft facilities or loan arrangements,
- any help which is likely to be available from other funds, such as Short Term Advances and Budgeting Advances issued by the Department for Work and Pensions or appropriate support facilities via 3rd Sector providers. During the

COVID 19 pandemic there are additional resources outside of the LWP scheme that residents may get referred to as appropriate,

- the financial circumstances of the applicant, any partner, their dependants and other occupiers of their household,
- the income and expenditure of the applicant, any partner, their dependants and other occupiers of their household,
- the level of indebtedness of the applicant and their family,
- any medical issues, or other exceptional needs, of the applicant, partner or dependants, or other members of their household,
- whether the circumstances of the applicant are such that a LWP award would alleviate the problems of the applicant,
- the possible impact on the Council of not making such an award, e.g. the applicant becoming homeless and the costs associated with this,
- any other special circumstance of which we are made aware of.

The Council will decide how much to award based on all of the applicant's circumstances and the LWP funds available and will be mindful of the likely total calls on the LWP fund.

In addition, the Council may make payments to local 3rd sector providers, where those providers can supply support or services that benefit the borough's residents. Eligibility for such payments will be determined by the Council.

3.5. Payment of a Local Welfare Provision Award

The Council will decide the most appropriate method of fulfilment based on the circumstances of each case. It is the preferred option of the Council not to make payments in the form of cash.

The methods may include:

- provision of goods or services by the Council or third party provider,
- bank account credit to the applicant or some other person as appropriate,
- credit directly to a landlord or rent account,
- cash or similar method of payment in exceptional cases.

Once an award is decided, the goods or service will be delivered or payment will be made, as soon as practicably possible. Goods will not necessarily be new and recycled goods with the appropriate checks made may be offered to support climate change.

To support climate change, gas cookers will not be offered, unless there is a specific and valid reason to.

3.6. Notification

The Council will notify the applicant of the outcome of their request on the day the decision is made. This will be in writing by email or letter.

Where the application is successful, the Council will tell the applicant:

- the amount of the award,
- the purpose for which the award should be used,
- the method of payment or fulfilment.

Where the request for a LWP award is unsuccessful or not met in full, the Council will explain the reasons why the decision was made and explain the applicant's right of appeal.

The Council may, with the applicant's permission, also inform a support worker or advice agency of a decision.

3.7. The Right to Appeal

LWP awards are not subject to a statutory appeals process. Appeals will therefore be decided by the Council.

The Council will operate the following policy for dealing with appeals about either the decision not to make an award or the amount of an award:

- An applicant (or their representative) who wants an explanation of a LWP application decision may request one in writing within one calendar month of notification of the decision.

- An applicant (or their representative) who disagrees with a decision may appeal the decision.
- Any appeal must be made in writing or electronically but must be made within one calendar month of the original LWP decision or of the written reasons being notified to the applicant.
- Where possible the Council will try to resolve the matter by explaining the reasons for the decision to the applicant or their representative either verbally or in writing.
- Where agreement cannot be reached, the Council will review the decision. The officer reviewing the decision will not have been involved in the making of the original decision. The review will be suspended if more information is needed from the applicant.
- The applicant will have one calendar month to respond to the request for further information. Thereafter the review will be undertaken on the information held. If the Council decides that the original decision should not be revised, we will provide full written reasons to the applicant, within ten working days.

3.8. Overpayments

If the Council becomes aware that the information contained in an application for a LWP award was incorrect or that relevant information was not declared, either intentionally or otherwise, the Council may seek to recover the value of any LWP award made as a result of that application. In addition to normal recovery methods, deduction from appropriate benefits, sundry debtors invoice, county court judgement and bailiff action or outstanding LWP award overpayments may be recovered (if appropriate) from any subsequent LWP awards made to the claimant or their partner.

3.9. Fraud

The Council is committed to the fight against fraud in all its forms. Any applicant who tries to fraudulently claim a LWP award might have committed an offence under the Fraud Act 2006.

If the Council suspects that fraud may have occurred, the matter will be investigated as appropriate and this could lead to criminal proceedings.

3.10. Publicity

In addition to details being on the Council's website, the scheme is advertised directly to benefit claimants and to local welfare rights advisors.

Application details are set out on the Council's website or will be sent in response to any request received by email, telephone, in person or in writing.

4. Monitoring

The Welfare & Benefits Team will monitor the amount and types of award made. This monitoring information will be available for management, Members and other relevant interested parties at any time.

5. Financial Implications

Funding for 2013/14 and 2014/15 financial years was agreed and notified to the Council by the DWP in a settlement letter of 7th August 2012. Funding for both years was set at £77,213. Funding of £69,000 for 15/16 was paid as part of the governments settlement grant. Payments have always been contained within and limited to Government funding allocations. Although there has been no specific allocated funding since 2016/17, the council has decided to continue to provide funds to run its scheme from general funds. £20,000 was allocated for the provision of this in 2016/17 and £23,170 since 2017/18. The funding of £23,170 will continue for 21/22 and for future years unless otherwise decided.

Based on previous years spend, this should be sufficient to meet the needs of the most vulnerable in the borough. No further Council funds will be added to the LWP budget. However, it is difficult to assess the level of take up each year, but it is anticipated that claims and payments during the COVID 19 pandemic may rise.

The position will be closely monitored and reviewed regularly.