

# The Local Discretionary Social Fund Policy

This document sets out how the scheme will work in detail and will form the basis of the procedures and guidance given to the staff who administer it.

## Aims

Assistance from this fund will be guided by the following:

- To allow people to return to or remain in the community without the need for additional support from services.
- To support vulnerable residents in urgent situations through the provision and access to goods, or through signposting to appropriate support services and advice.
- To use the funds in the short term to prevent further and higher impacts on other service budgets in the city.
- To engage individuals with appropriate support services where needed, to prevent repeat applications.
- To support vulnerable people in a holistic way which will have a positive effect, without the use of cash.
- To meet standing statutory duties under Homeless, Equalities, Human Rights Act and Child Protection legislation.

## Route In

People seeking assistance from the LDSF will need to make an application. In addition, where the council identifies specific cohorts of users whose needs can be met outside of an application process that might otherwise exclude them from seeking assistance, the council can arrange for provisions to be made through alternative routes. This may include devolving elements of the budget to, and enable direct administration by, services that already support these cohorts.

## Basic Criteria

In order to make a decision to give assistance, staff will need to be satisfied that one of the following has occurred or is occurring to an individual, a household or an individual within a household:

- A) An unexpected or serious event has occurred and their health or wellbeing would be put at risk if they do not otherwise receive items essential to their needs.
- B) Without support from the fund, the person or household would need further support or care.
- C) To support vulnerable people through temporary periods where they have no means to supply themselves with essential items and where other provisions are not available. For example, where someone has started work but has not yet been paid.

## **Circumstances in which assistance may not be given.**

Assistance may not be given for, or in, the following circumstances:

1. Where other statutory provisions are in place; including but not restricted to:
  - Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) budgeting loans
  - DWP Short Term Benefit Advance (STBA)
  - DWP statutory Social Fund payments (for example Winter Fuel Allowance)
2. Where the applicant could provide for themselves or their family
3. Rent in Advance or moving costs: This should be applied for from the Revenues & Benefits Service's Discretionary Payments for Rent and Council Tax
4. Where the applicant has had three payments from the fund already in the last year, unless the circumstances are exceptional
5. For items other than that which the council can provide
6. Where liability exists elsewhere which addresses the issue
7. To make up for the reduction in another benefit which has been legitimately sanctioned
8. Where requests for medical or disability related equipment are not supported by an assessment from an appropriate health professional e.g. Occupational Therapist

## **Personal Eligibility Criteria**

A person is only entitled to payments from this fund in meeting all of the following circumstances:

1. They are resident in Brighton & Hove and must not have moved there predominantly for the purpose of accessing these funds. Or where this council has placed the individual or household outside of the city as a result of statutory duties we have to them
2. They are in receipt of, or have applied and are likely to be entitled to, a means tested benefit or tax credit, or they are on a low working wage
3. Where they do not have the personal means, or cannot otherwise get access to the means for the provisions required

## **Verification**

An applicant is required to provide documentation or other evidence which is reasonably required to demonstrate their circumstances; this will include:

- Proof of identification
- Proof of all income, savings and bank, building society or post office accounts, covering a period of at least the last one month
- Where crime or lost property is involved, evidence these have been reported to the police
- Other evidence as may be reasonably required to demonstrate the circumstances surrounding an application; for example photographic evidence of fire damaged items
- A Council officer may visit a person's property to establish the circumstances of a case
- The council will always seek to verify these items itself before asking the applicant to do so

## **Provisions**

Where a decision is made to give assistance, the council will usually provide it in one or more of the following ways:

1. Suppliers will provide the applicant with items directly
2. Bus and train tickets from the council's own offices
3. Shop specific pre-paid cards. These will be standard gift cards and as such not identifiable as originating from this service, so avoiding any stigmatisation
4. Payments directly to utility companies, or through PayPoint vouchers for payment directly onto key or card meters

In all cases the council will make a decision as to whether it is appropriate to refer an applicant on to other support services where there may be other issues in which they demonstrate they need that support. There will be cases where a referral to other support services will be an appropriate course of action, when payment from the fund is not.

## **Award Limit**

It is not possible to predict every circumstance against which an application to this fund will be made. As such there will be no absolute limit to the level of awards which may be made. However any assistance which is agreed will reduce the budget and as a consequence reduce the funds available to help other vulnerable people. As such, it will be vital to ensure that only genuine need is addressed and value for money achieved.

## **Reviewing A Decision**

If a person disagrees with a decision not to make an award, or the level of the award which has been agreed, they will be able to ask for that decision to be reviewed. In these cases a member of staff who was not involved in the original decision will review the case.