

# Discretionary Hardship & Support Grant

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<b>Content</b>		<b>Page</b>
<b>1.0</b>	Introduction & scheme aims	3
<b>2.0</b>	Forms of Support	4
2.1	- Crisis Living Support	4
2.2	- Resettlement Support	5
<b>3.0</b>	Eligibility	6
3.1	- Scheme Eligibility	6
3.2	- Crisis Living Support Eligibility	7
3.3	- Resettlement Scheme Eligibility	7 - 8
<b>4.0</b>	Application	8
4.1	- Application Process	8
4.2	- Award Values	8
4.3	- Verification	8
4.4	- Fraud	9
<b>5.0</b>	Monitoring arrangements and managing the scheme	9
<b>6.0</b>	Delegation	9
<b>7.0</b>	Version Control	9

## 1.0. Introduction & scheme aims

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North Norfolk District Council, People Services, will deliver a provision for discretionary financial support to help people deal with emergencies, resettle, or remain living in the community, and to ease exceptional pressures on households.

The purpose of this policy is to determine eligibility for a payment under the Council's Discretionary Hardship & Support Grant.

The scheme will run from 4<sup>th</sup> July 2022 for a two year period:

Period of funding	Amount of funding
4 <sup>th</sup> July 2022 to 31 <sup>st</sup> March 2023	£80,097
1 <sup>st</sup> April 2023 to 31 <sup>st</sup> March 2024	£100,000

The scheme has a set budget available per financial year and once this budget has been exhausted, no more awards can be made for the remainder of the financial year. It is therefore essential that assistance through the scheme is targeted at households in the greatest need and who have no other source of assistance available to them.

Any underspend from the first year will be rolled into the second year. If there is an underspend remaining at the end of the second year, an extension to the scheme may be considered.

The fund is discretionary and limited and there is no entitlement to an award. Not all eligible applicants will be successful, for example in the event that there is no further funding available for the financial year.

This document sets out the eligibility criteria to be applied when assessing applications for support through the Discretionary Hardship & Support Grant. This scheme will seek to assist vulnerable people where exceptional circumstances have left them unable to meet their immediate short term needs, where they require help to maintain their independence within the community or where assistance is required with resettlement into the community.

The Council will consider making an award under this scheme to all residents who meet the qualifying criteria as specified within the scheme. The Council will treat all applications on their individual merits, and will seek through the operation of this policy to:

- alleviate poverty;
- support vulnerable young people in the transition to adult life;
- safeguard residents in their own homes;
- keep families together;
- support the vulnerable in the local community;
- help people through personal and difficult events.

The scheme seeks to treat all applicants fairly and equitably within a transparent process taking full account of the Council's responsibilities under all relevant government legislation, for example the Human Rights Act and Equality Act 2010.

Full consideration will be given to each applicants circumstances. Consideration will be given to the nature, extent and urgency of the need in every case where an application for assistance is made.

The scheme will seek to signpost to alternative sources of support or assistance where possible in order to protect the remaining funds for residents in the greatest need or where an award cannot be offered under this scheme.

## 2.0 Forms of Hardship

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### 2.1. Crisis Living Support

This element of the scheme is to assist with an immediate short term need for assistance with items such as food, gas, electricity, baby consumables, white goods, household items, school uniforms, and essential work items. The intention is for this category to meet the specific needs of a household and therefore it is not prescriptive in what it can be applied for. The applicant must be able to demonstrate that the household has an essential need for the item being applied for and that they are unable to access it through any other means.

Each application will be assessed on its own merit, taking into account the specific needs and circumstances of the individual household.

Support is available for vulnerable households who are experiencing a disaster, crisis or exceptional financial pressure and the health of a member of a household may significantly deteriorate as a direct result. Our support will be delivered through non-cash options where possible such as vouchers or goods, but ensuring we maximise our impact, ensure support is timely, and we maintain the dignity of our residents.

Assistance can be provided in the form of either:

- Food voucher or PayPoint voucher
- Fuel voucher or PayPoint voucher for gas or electricity

(The value of the voucher will be dependent on individual circumstance and household composition. Maximum voucher value for food will be £50 and for fuel will be £150).

- White goods such as fridge freezer, washing machine, cooker.
- Household items such as furniture, furnishings, bedding, etc.
- Minor repairs.

Items must be essential to the household's wellbeing and where there is a verified need. Voucher to be provided for the value of the item and to be purchased from a pre-defined shop or purchased directly by the Council on behalf of the applicant for delivery to the resident's home address.

Households are eligible for no more than two awards in each year of the Crisis Support scheme for the lifetime of the Crisis Living Support Scheme.

For the purpose of this scheme a household are members of the same family who live together. Applications from the same household will be treated as repeat applications.

The scheme is able to assist with replacing broken or worn out goods where they are essential items.

In exceptional circumstances discretion may be given to allow a further award to a household who has already been awarded white goods or other essential items, or to replace broken white goods where failure to do so would result in the applicant having to enter care or would be at risk of homelessness or extreme financial hardship. Such applications should be supported by full written account of the decision.

All applications will be considered on their own merits, the nature of the household's circumstances, the impact of any refusal on their wellbeing, and the availability of other sources of assistance should be taken into account.

Any decision is final and a refusal cannot be appealed.

## 2.2. Resettlement Support

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This element of the scheme is to assist with costs associated with re-establishment or remaining in the community after a period of unsettled or supported accommodation. Support from the scheme may help to:

- assist those who have moved into temporary accommodation maintain contact with their support network;
- assist with travel costs associated with attending job interviews or training;
- improve an applicant's existing living conditions;
- allow people to remain in the community rather than enter an institution;
- allow people to maintain their independence;
- enable people to move to accommodation which is more suitable;
- move people nearer to someone who can offer them support;
- allow the applicant (or family member / carer) to set up home as part of a planned resettlement programme (following an unsettled way of life);
- support people to sustain employment.

The intention is for this category to meet the specific needs of a household and therefore it is not prescriptive in what it can be applied for. The applicant must be able to demonstrate that the household has an essential need for the support being applied for and that they are unable to access it through any other means.

Each application will be assessed on its own merit, taking into account the specific needs and circumstances of the individual household.

Assistance can be provided through:

- white goods;
- essential basic household items such as small electrical items, furniture, furnishings, bedding, etc.;
- utility connection charges;
- removal or storage charges;
- clothing to support school or employment needs;
- documentation renewal costs i.e. passport, drivers licence;
- household clearance costs i.e. cost of skip;

Households are only eligible for one award under the Resettlement Support scheme. For the purpose of this scheme a household are members of the same family who live together. Applications from the same household will be treated as repeat applications.

All applications will be considered on their own merits, and the nature of the household's circumstances, the impact of any refusal on their wellbeing and the availability of other sources of assistance should be taken into account.

Any decision is final and a refusal cannot be appealed.

## 3.0. Eligibility

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### 3.1. Scheme eligibility

In order to ensure the scheme is able to assist as many vulnerable households as possible, it is necessary to target assistance at the most vulnerable residents or those facing the most serious pressures.

Access to the fund will be via an application process through the Benefits Service or via a referral from the Early Help & Prevention Team or Housing Options Team. All applications will be cross referenced with the Norfolk Vulnerability Hub (NVH) and details of any additional support provided to the applicant will be recorded on the NVH.

Assistance to the Crisis Living Support Scheme and the Resettlement Scheme can be applied for if the person or household meets the following criteria:

- The applicant is 16 years of age or more;
- The applicant has been resident in North Norfolk for 3 months or more, or has a strong connection to the North Norfolk area if they are homeless, or moving into the area after leaving custody or care;
- Have recourse to public funds and are habitually resident;
- Have no access to savings or other means of accessing support.

The applicant also needs to be in one of the following groups:

- Household at risk of homelessness;
- Homeless household;
- Household where a person is fleeing from domestic abuse;
- Household with dependent children;
- Households with a pregnant woman;
- Household where a person has a disability or long-term illness;
- Household where a person is receiving formal care or support in the home;
- Household where a person is receiving support from mental health services;
- Household trying to access or maintain employment, education, or training;

The applicant must in receipt of, or in the process of claiming at least one of the following income related benefits:

- Housing Benefit;
- Council Tax Support;
- Job Seekers Allowance (IB);
- Employment Support Allowance (Income Based);
- Pension Credit (Guaranteed Credit);
- Pension Credit (Savings Credit);
- Universal Credit.

The decision maker will also be required to consider entitlement to other funding such as the Energy Rebate Scheme and the Household Support Fund before an award is made from the Discretionary Hardship & Support Grant.

## 3.2. Crisis Living Support Eligibility

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In addition to the scheme criteria listed in section 3.1, applicants will also be required to fall into one of the groups below:

- Experiencing exceptional financial difficulty. This could be for example, following a burglary, following job loss, ill health, or having to pay for an unexpected significant expense;
- Experienced a disaster or an emergency. This could be a fire, flood, bereavement, or an accident;
- Experiencing homelessness or the threat of homelessness;
- Fleeing from domestic abuse.

The Crisis Living Support element of the scheme is available to meet the unplanned need of a household experiencing crisis and is therefore not able to assist due to minor mishaps or damage, failure of a household item, lost or spent money or inability to access savings or capital, except in exceptional circumstances.

For clarity, the scheme cannot assist in the following circumstances:

- Any application made that is felt to be not an immediate need or where alternative means are available;
- The applicant is able to get help using their own savings or by budgeting;
- Items lost due to burglary or disaster which are covered by an insurance policy or are a landlord's responsibility;
- Specialist disability equipment or adaptations;
- Personal debts;
- Where a referral to the Cromer & District food/energy bank would be appropriate;
- Where a referral to the Norfolk Assistance Scheme would be appropriate.

## 3.3. Resettlement Support Eligibility

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The resettlement support is intended to meet the planned needs of a vulnerable person entering or leaving temporary or supported accommodation.

In addition to the scheme eligibility listed in section 3.1, applicants will also be required to fall into one of the groups below:

- Homeless households or rough sleepers moving into secure accommodation.
- Where someone is leaving hospital.
- Where someone is leaving prison.
- Where someone is leaving care.
- Where someone is moving out of temporary accommodation.
- Where someone is moving out of a refuge.
- Where someone is moving out of a hostel or supported accommodation.

For clarity, the scheme cannot assist in the following circumstances:

- The applicant is able to get help using their own savings or by budgeting.
- Where a payment from the Homeless Prevention Fund would be appropriate
- Where an application through the Discretionary Housing Payment Scheme would be appropriate.
- Where a referral to the Norfolk Assistance Scheme would be appropriate.

In order to ensure that applications are appropriate, the authority will need to ensure any resettlement support is supported by the applicant's case worker, where applicable. For example, an officer from the Early Help & Prevention Team, an officer from the Housing Options Team or from one of the Registered Social Landlords, an officer from the Prison or Probation Services, Social Care or Health Services, Refuge Support Officers, or Supported Accommodation Officers.

## **4.0. Application**

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### **4.1. Application Process**

Residents are not able to apply directly to the scheme, and need to apply through a designated team in People Services; Benefits Team, Early Help & Prevention Team; Housing Options Team; or the Housing Adaptations Team.

An officer from People Services will complete an online application form. The application form will ask a series of questions to confirm that the applicant is eligible for support under the scheme and that they meet all the criteria set out within this document. As part of the application, the officer will confirm the details of the support required.

All applications will be cross referenced with the Norfolk Vulnerability Hub (NVH) and details of any additional support provided to the applicant will be recorded on the NVH.

Decisions will be notified to the applicant either in writing or by email within 14 days. A copy of the decision will also be made available to a third party acting on behalf of the applicant where consent has been provided.

The council may request the applicant to provide a breakdown of their income and expenditure to seek to maximise the customer's income by checking the availability of state benefits and other sources of financial assistance that may be available to the customer upon application.

Information provided will be used to process applications for the Discretionary Hardship & Support Grant and this information may be shared with other council departments in order to check information, protect public funds and to identify any other help the applicant may be entitled to. The information provided may be shared with other organisations that handle public funds and for cross system and cross authority comparison for the detection and prevention of crime as allowed by law.

### **4.2. Award Values**

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Award values will be at the discretion of the Council but will be based on standard prices for items required including the cost of delivery and installation. Once the fund has been exhausted for the respective financial year, there will be no further awards. Cash awards will only be given in exceptional circumstances.

### **4.3. Verification**

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The council will verify the identity of the applicant, their residential address, and where a payment is to be made into a bank account, the bank account details will be verified also. No payment will be made into a bank account where the name on the bank account does not match the applicant.

Should the council require additional information in order to establish eligibility, it is expected that the applicant provides all necessary details as soon as possible but within 14 days of the date of request. Further details on how this request will be made and responsibilities to supply such information will be confirmed in writing to the applicant. If the customer is unable to or does not provide the required evidence, the Benefits Service will make its decision based on the information available.



## 4.4. Fraud

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North Norfolk District Council is committed to the fight against fraud in all its forms. A customer who tries to fraudulently claim support under the Discretionary Hardship & Support 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.

## 5.0. Monitoring arrangements and managing the scheme

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The Benefits Service will undertake monitoring of the number, amount and period of awards made under the Discretionary Hardship & Support Grant in relation to the available budget. The purpose is to ensure there are sufficient funds to meet demands of the budget throughout the financial year. Once the fund has been exhausted for the respective financial year, there will be no further awards.

People Services will use data on awards to gain an understanding of the effectiveness of the support they have provided under the scheme to meet local welfare needs.

The Benefits Service will also monitor cases where a Discretionary Hardship & Support Grant request has been refused to ensure decisions are being made fairly and consistently. The Council is subject to the general equality duty. This means that steps will be taken to monitor implementation of this policy to ensure equality of the scheme.

The scheme will be periodically reviewed to ensure it continues to deliver support to our residents and meets the council's aims.

## 6.0. Delegation

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The council has approved this scheme. The Assistant Director for People Services is authorised to make technical policy amendments to ensure the scheme meets the criteria intended by the council.

## 7.0. Version control

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Officer Name	Version Updated	Date Updated	Review Date
Trudi Grant – Benefits Manager	Draft	9 <sup>th</sup> May 2022	1 <sup>st</sup> April 2023