

BATH AND NORTH EAST SOMERSET COUNCIL

Appendix to Welfare Support Policy

Welfare and Hardship support 2021/22

Introduction

The Covid-19 Pandemic has caused unprecedented change for residents of Bath and North East Somerset. Although the government has introduced measures to mitigate job losses and to support residents and businesses, many have still faced hardship through reduced earnings and through increased costs through working from home and in facilitating home schooling.

In 2021/22 the council will introduce extra funding to support residents who are experiencing additional hardship which has arisen as a result of the Covid-19 Pandemic. This will complement the council's existing Welfare Support scheme.

The overriding principle behind this scheme will be to aid residents facing hardship with bills and basic living costs.

Eligible Living costs

Awards to help with these costs will be made through direct purchase from suppliers or to applicants through the issue of Prepaid debit cards, which may be used to pay for the following;

Council Tax.

Awards may be made to help residents to pay council tax debts, or to meet ongoing liabilities for the 2021/22 financial year. This will be subject to a financial assessment of the applicant and their household, and a decision based on their means to pay their debt. Wherever possible the applicant will be encouraged to make some contribution to their council tax to reduce the need to rely on additional support, bearing in mind that this funding is temporary.

Payment of Utility bills.

Awards may be made to help residents facing increased utility bills, for example where there are increased energy costs incurred due to home-schooling or through having to work from home. Awards may also be made to residents to clear arrears relating to utility bills.

Payment of fuel costs.

Awards can be made to cover the cost of heating oil or other domestic fuel types.

Purchasing household items.

Awards may be made to residents who need to purchase essential items to furnish their home. This includes the following items;

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Washing Machine, Tumble drier, Cooker, Fridge, Freezer, Microwave, Toaster, Crockery, Utensils, Sofas, Chairs, Table, Wardrobe, Beds

Flooring.

Awards may be made to residents to purchase and install carpets or other suitable flooring.

Clothing and bedding.

Awards may be made to residents to purchase clothing and bedding for themselves and household members. This includes school uniforms.

Debt.

Awards may be made to residents who are in debt where this is having a significant effect on their wellbeing. Debts that may be considered as eligible include arrears of council tax and utility bills. Other debts may be considered however the actions the debtor took in accruing the debt will be considered when deciding whether it is appropriate to make an award. A test of reasonableness will be applied to determine whether the applicant acted irresponsibly when accruing the debt. Examples of debts where it would not be appropriate to provide help with debts are where a loan was taken out by the applicant to fund a holiday or to purchase leisure items

Items for children

Although awards may not be made in respect of leisure items and toys, practical items such as pushchairs, prams and cots may be considered as eligible items.

Eligibility

As this is an extension of the Welfare Support scheme, the same eligibility criteria will apply based on residency and financial hardship. Applications from households where finances have been particularly impacted by the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic will be prioritised for awards made under this funding. This is particularly relevant where residents have lost work or have lost employment through redundancy as a result of the pandemic.

There is no automatic right to awards under this funding stream and any awards will be made solely at the discretion of the Welfare Support Officer, having regard to the circumstances of each case.

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Conditions.

The same conditions which apply to assistance provided under the main Welfare Support scheme will apply to awards made under this funding stream. The council's Welfare Support scheme is cashless, and awards must not be sold or given to a third party. Where an applicant makes false statements in relation to an application for support the council may prosecute that person and recover any amounts or items awarded.

Restrictions.

The funding is intended to help with essential living costs and should not be used to help residents with business costs, leisure items or holidays. Applicants will be responsible for ensuring that pre-paid cards are used only to purchase items or to help with bills as agreed by the council, and the council will terminate any awards where there has been inappropriate use of prepayment cards

Assistance granted under this funding stream constitutes Public Funds for the purpose of the Immigration rules.

Funding.

Specific funding has been allocated to meet the increased need of banes residents in 2021/22 and this appendix to the Welfare Support Policy will be disapplied from 1st April 2022 or earlier, if the funding is exhausted within the 2021/22 financial year.

Amount of awards.

This will depend on the circumstances of each case and is at the discretion of the Welfare Support officer. In some circumstances it would be appropriate for the applicant to make some contribution to the cost of the item, the debt or bill themselves. The table below lists the overall maximum amount that would normally be awarded for each area of need; however, it should not be construed as an indication of a likely award. For each household, an overall maximum award of £1,500 will apply and this would only be exceeded in exceptional circumstances with the authorisation of the Welfare Support team leader. Each award will cover the 2021/22 financial year and although more than one award may be made within the year, this is subject to the overall maximum amounts detailed in this section and at the discretion of the Welfare Support Officer and Team Leader.

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Cost	Maximum award
Council Tax	£1000.00
Utility bills	£1000.00
Household items	£1250.00
Flooring	£1000.00
Clothing	£350.00
Debt	£1500.00
Items for children	£750.00

Applications

Applications must be made to the Welfare Support team by email and telephone, in line with the current processes which cover Local Welfare Provision. Evidence of identity and finances including savings will need to be provided in every case. Referrals may be made by other council departments such as Connecting Families or Children's Centre staff, and trusted partner organisations may also make applications on behalf of residents.

Reviews

As with the existing Local Welfare Provision scheme there is no right of appeal against a decision not to make an award under this fund. Any request for a review of a decision must be made within one month and will be made by a different officer to the officer who made the original decision. There is no right of review of the second decision.