



MANCHESTER  
CITY COUNCIL

# Manchester City Council Welfare Provision Scheme

Policy document effective from April 2024

Directorate - Revenues and Benefits Unit  
Date – June 2024  
Version - 2.0

## **1. Purpose**

The purpose of this policy is to outline the operating principles of the Council's Welfare Provision Scheme and to provide guidance on how the scheme will be administered by the Council.

The Council will provide financial support in the form of grants to Manchester residents who are suffering financial hardship and:

- Have been subject to an emergency or disaster situation, and are at the point of crisis; or
- Have had to move home due to fear of violence, significant health or care needs or as a result of an emergency or disaster, or as part of a supported or emergency rehousing, and their previous furniture is no longer available; or
- Need additional furniture or equipment to enable them to stay within their current home and maintain independent living; or
- Are in a vulnerable group and are in extreme fuel poverty in that they are unable to afford immediate fuel costs or have been disconnected.

The Council will also provide support to residents moving into work but who remain on a low income with the provision of a grant to assist with public transport costs for the first month of employment.

The Council recognises a commitment to support care leavers up to the age of 25 and to ex-members of the Armed Forces within the parameters of the Scheme.

Support for carers is described in Appendix 1.

## **2. Objectives of the Scheme**

The objectives of the Welfare Provision Scheme are to:

- Support Manchester residents who are vulnerable with their immediate hardship needs, enabling them to live an independent life and to complement (but not replace) other specialist care support provided by the Council;
- Prevent short term, exceptional hardship following a crisis or emergency;
- Sustain tenancies, especially where the resident is at greater risk of not maintaining a tenancy, for example after a period of street homelessness or after leaving care;
- Prevent homelessness;
- Keep families together;
- Support people to live independently in their own home;
- Encourage and facilitate people to return to work whenever possible;
- Help to alleviate debt and encourage better money management;
- Help those who are trying to help themselves;
- Help people through personal crises and unforeseeable events; and
- Reduce benefit dependency where possible.

### **3. Key Principles Underpinning the Scheme**

The Welfare Provision Scheme is administered at the discretion of the Council; however, there are several key principles which underpins its delivery:

- The Council is not under any obligation to provide a scheme;
- The scheme is discretionary, and there is no statutory right to payment or award;
- This scheme is not intended to replicate or take over the responsibility of statutory agencies;
- Each award will have regard to the budget;
- Awards will normally only be made to those who meet eligibility criteria in accordance with this policy. However, even if this is the case the Council has the overriding discretion to refuse an award, and this will be linked to budget restrictions and any other conditionality in this policy;
- Eligibility criteria will be used to ensure that the funds are targeted at the most vulnerable residents and those with greatest need. Decisions on eligibility and exclusion will be reasonable and rational and subject to a certain degree of flexibility and discretion in order to meet exceptional cases and circumstances as and when necessary;
- Residents who do not meet eligibility criteria will be signposted to the wider offer of universal services and support available from the third/community and voluntary sector;
- Each application will be treated on its own merits and will receive equal and fair treatment to take account of the Council's responsibilities under all relevant legislation;
- There is no right to a formal appeal; residents who are found to be ineligible for support may however request a reconsideration of their case. This process is listed in this policy; and;
- Each applicant will normally be restricted to a limited number of awards within a set time period, commencing from the date their last application was approved.

### **4. Awards and Assistance provided by the Scheme**

The Welfare Provision Scheme normally supports residents with five broad areas of need or circumstances:

- (a) Residents being re-housed/resettled into new accommodation due to fear of violence, significant health/care needs, following a disaster or emergency, or as part of a supported resettlement programme, typically from supported and temporary homeless accommodation; or
- (b) Residents requiring support to stay within their home and maintain independent living, with significant and enduring medical/care/support needs; or

- (c) Residents requiring immediate financial assistance following a crisis or an emergency. This includes families who report that a child cannot attend school due to a crisis will be considered for or signposted to appropriate support.
- (d) Residents that are in extreme fuel poverty in that they are unable to afford immediate heating costs or have been disconnected.
- (e) Residents moving into work (following a period of unemployment) but who remain on a low income with the provision of a grant to assist with public transport costs for the first month of employment. The intention is to sustain employment by ensuring that travel costs are met during the transition period from welfare benefits to salary.

The Welfare Provision Scheme offers support to residents accessing the scheme in the form of grants and essential items as described below:

- Re-housing and resettlement support – Provision of minimum essential furniture items. In most cases this will be limited to the provision of beds (or cot), bedding and linen packs, cooker/microwave, fridge/freezer and kitchen starter pack. In some cases (where health or family circumstances require) the Council will consider the additional provision of a washing machine.  
(Normally one award over a rolling 3-year period); or
- Support to stay within their home – provision of essential furniture or equipment items;  
(Normally one award per household over a rolling 3-year period); or
- Immediate response to severe fuel poverty – a voucher of up to £49 that is used to top up the resident’s fuel card or utility account.  
(Normally one award per individual over a rolling 12-month period);
- Support following a crisis or emergency – a cash grant of up to £60.  
(Normally one award per individual over a rolling 12-month period); or
- Travel expenses – a cash grant to support the purchase of a bus/travel pass for the first four weeks of employment. (Normally one award per individual).

NB. The number of awards made during the periods indicated will be based on individual circumstances and presenting need.

Depending upon needs and circumstances, it may be possible for a resident to receive more than one type of support.

#### **4.1 Award Provision**

##### **Furniture/White Goods**

All furniture or goods provided by the Scheme will:

- Be of good quality;

- Be covered by a supplier warranty;
- Be delivered to and, where applicable, installed at the address provided;
- Meet all current regulations including fire protection; all electrical goods will conform to legislation relating to domestic electrical appliances within the UK.

No cash awards will be made available for furniture or white goods items.

Due to the limited funding available and high level of expected claims, the Welfare Provision Scheme will limit the support provided to meet essential needs only, unless there are exceptional circumstances.

### **Fuel Grants**

This will be a one-off non-repayable grant of up to £49 to support residents with an emergency fuel purchase. This would be normally paid via a PayPoint payment that when collected at the retail unit is transferred to the utility account.

### **Travel Grants**

Provision of a one-off non-repayable amount equivalent to the most economic cost of public transport to and from the resident's home address for the first four weeks of employment (for example by the provision of a bus pass).

### **Cash Grants**

This will be a one-off non-repayable grant of £30 or £60 to support residents following an emergency or crisis. This would normally be sent via a PayPoint payment, which can be collected at a PayPoint retail unit, or by a bank transfer payment.

## **4.2 Outside the scope of this scheme**

The Welfare Provision Scheme will not duplicate existing support, payments or awards (whether statutory or discretionary) which are provided by other parts of the Council, other government agencies or third sector organisations.

In addition, the scheme will not provide support for needs which are met through benefits administered by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) including but not exclusive to:

- Short Term Benefit Advances (formally Crisis Loan Alignment Payments),
- Budgeting Loans / Budgeting Advances (for Universal Credit recipients),
- Sure Start Maternity Grants,
- Funeral Payments,
- Cold Weather Payments,
- Winter Fuel Payments, and
- JSA/ESA Hardship Payments. ( [www.gov.uk/browse/benefits](http://www.gov.uk/browse/benefits) ).

This scheme is not normally able to respond to and mitigate the general impact of the sanctions regime administered by the DWP. Residents will normally be referred to the DWP's Hardship Scheme.

## 5. Eligibility Criteria

The Council uses eligibility criteria to ensure that the funds are targeted at the most vulnerable residents and those with greatest need.

Eligibility is tested through three qualifying stages:

1. First Stage – which determines whether residents are eligible based on age, income and residency criteria;
2. Second Stage – which determines whether residents are eligible based on their needs and circumstances criteria;
3. Third Stage – which determines whether residents are eligible based on any further exceptions or exclusions criteria.

At all stages the Council will be mindful of the overall budget expenditure and may have to revise awards and eligibility criteria in order to manage spend with the limited budget allocation.

A resident must meet the criteria for all three stages to qualify for an award. An overview of each stage is as follows:

### 5.1 First Stage Criteria

The First Stage requires residents to meet all the following criteria:

No.	Criteria	As Defined By:
1.1	Aged over 16 and live within the Manchester area or where the Council has a duty as defined by homelessness legislation.	Where a resident lives in the area covered by Manchester City Council; or is moving into this area due to domestic violence or as part of a witness protection scheme. In that they have a tenancy or own a property in the city or have been part of a household in the city. The Council will also provide support where we are placing homeless families into accommodation outside of the area and no support is available from the Council where the family will be resident.
1.2	Is in receipt of (or have claimed and are likely to get) either: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Income Support;</li> </ul>	Resident has claimed and is likely to be entitled to* or is in receipt of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Income Support;</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Jobseeker's Allowance;</li> <li>● Employment Support Allowance;</li> <li>● Guaranteed Pension Credit; or</li> <li>● Universal Credit.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Jobseeker's Allowance;</li> <li>● Employment Support Allowance;</li> <li>● Guaranteed Pension Credit; or</li> <li>● Universal Credit**.</li> </ul> <p>*This is for people who may be moving due to domestic violence or as part of a witness protection scheme.</p> <p>**Dependent on other income</p>
1.3	Have no savings or capital.	Including savings in cash, money in banks, saving schemes, premium bonds, stocks, shares and investments in property or land.

Residents who do not meet the first stage criteria will be signposted to appropriate support and provision within their area/communities.

For Carers applying for support please see Appendix 1.

## 5.2 Second Stage Criteria

The Second Stage requires residents to meet one or more of the following criteria:

No.	Criteria	Evidence requirements
2.1	Residents being re-housed/resettled into new accommodation due to fear of violence, significant health/care needs, following a disaster or emergency, or as part of supported or emergency rehousing.	Evidence of the reason for moving will be required as well as evidence as to why furniture from the previous property is not available.
2.2	Residents requiring support to stay within their home and maintain independent living, with significant and enduring medical/care/support needs;	Evidence of the reason for the need for this support will be required from a health or social care professional.
2.3	Residents requiring immediate financial assistance.	Each case is considered based on its own merits and the crisis or emergency could include evidence from other parts of the Council, the landlord or the police.
2.4	Residents that are in specific vulnerable groups and are in extreme fuel poverty in that they are unable to afford immediate	Within the household there are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Children under 5; or</li> </ul>

	heating costs, particularly during the winter months.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● A member of the family with a disability or serious health needs; or</li> <li>● Over pension age; or</li> <li>● Other vulnerability issues for which each case would be considered on own merits.</li> </ul>
2.5	To provide residents who have just started work but remain on a low income with help towards public transport costs, so they are able to get to work.	Resident employed after a period of at least 6 months of unemployment. New salary/wages at or below the UK living wage (currently £11.44)

Residents who do not meet the second stage criteria will be signposted to appropriate support and provision within their area/communities.

### 5.3 Third Stage Criteria

The Third Stage requires residents to meet all of the following criteria:

No.	Criteria	As Defined
3.1	A resident does not meet any of the scheme's exclusions	See section 5.4.
3.2	Support required is not available or cannot be provided elsewhere	
3.3	Sufficient welfare funds are available at the time of application	

Residents who do not meet the third stage criteria will be signposted to appropriate support and provision within their area/communities.

### 5.4 Exclusions

Residents will usually be excluded from receiving support where they:

- (i) have exceeded the agreed maximum number of funding awards over a given timescale (see section 4 (i));
- (ii) are already receiving support from other areas (we do not duplicate funds);
- (iii) have no recourse to public funds (NRPF) status (considered as part of the Section 21 funding arrangements with Children and Families Directorate);

### 5.5 Exceptions

Decisions on eligibility and exclusion will be reasonable and rational and subject to a certain degree of flexibility and discretion in order to meet exceptional cases and circumstances as and when necessary.



Examples of exceptional cases and circumstances may include victims fleeing domestic violence who do not meet the First Stage criteria on residency or income, or residents who are displaced as a result of a major disaster or civil contingency issues such as fire, flood or gas explosion who would not normally meet income criteria.

## **6. Making a Claim**

All applications should be made using the online application form accessed through the Council's website [www.manchester.gov.uk/benefits](http://www.manchester.gov.uk/benefits)

To ensure maximum accessibility for the online application, applications can be made in four ways:

- (i) By the person or household requiring support;
- (ii) Supported by a family member or friend;
- (iii) Supported by a third-party organisation, such as a Registered Provider, Advice Agency, Probation Service or charity organisation;
- (iv) Supported within the Council – including within the Council's Customer Service Centre or Libraries.

Applicants will be asked a series of questions to establish whether they satisfy the criteria, whether funds are available to them, and to identify support which is already in place.

## **7. Data Sharing**

On application, residents are required to sign a disclaimer agreement which will enable back-office staff to use data from existing benefits claims (for example, Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support) and Council Tax records as evidence of eligibility for funds and residency.

In addition, where appropriate a referral to other Council departments or external agencies will be made to provide advice and support for example Social Services, Homelessness, and Complex Families.

The Council may also share data for cross-checking purposes both internally and with external organisations; including government departments, for the prevention and detection of fraud and/or crime. This may include checks to confirm entitlement to discounts and exemptions.

Any use of personal data will be in full accordance with the Data Protection Act 2018 and the General Data Protection Regulation 2018.

## **8. Awarding and Making a Decision**

In deciding whether to provide support and the amount of any payment awarded, the Welfare Provision Scheme will consider:

- Whether the resident meets the eligibility criteria;
- Any evidence, or lack of evidence to support the claim;
- The amount of the remaining budget at the time of the award;
- The financial circumstances of the applicant and their family (including any savings or benefits which could be used to contribute towards the costs);
- The impact on other services within the Council if a payment is not awarded for example Social Care;
- Any existing support, payments or awards (whether statutory or discretionary) which are provided by other parts of the Council, other government agencies or third-sector organisations;
- Any steps already taken, or that can be taken in the future by the applicant to alleviate the problem or crisis; or
- Whether the applicant has contributed towards the crisis or emergency.

## **8.1 Timescales**

The Welfare Provision Scheme operates during the working hours of 9am-5pm, Monday to Friday. Residents may apply for support outside of these working hours; however, the application will not be processed until the earliest possible time during working hours. The Council does not provide awards outside of these hours. The aim is to deal with applications within the following timescales:

- For cash grants following a crisis or emergency - within two days of receiving the application.
- For travel grants - within five days of receiving the application.
- For furniture/white goods grants - within ten days of receiving the application.
- For fuel grants - within two working days of receiving the application.

## **8.2 Notification**

Once a decision has been made on whether an application has been successful or not, the claimant is advised by email with the reasons for this decision. They will also be told by telephone if these details are provided.

If successful, an explanation is provided of the support and how the award will be made. If an application is unsuccessful details of the reconsideration process are provided.

## **9. Reconsideration Procedure**

Residents who apply for support and are deemed to be ineligible may ask for a reconsideration of the decision.

Reconsiderations must be received within 28 days of the original application decision date.

When a reconsideration request is received the Council will reconsider the decision. All reconsiderations are considered by an officer not involved in the original decision and a new decision will be made within 10 working days of when the request was received. This is limited to one reconsideration per application.

There is no right to reconsideration if the award has been refused because the scheme's budget has been exhausted. Funds are monitored on a monthly basis.

## **10. Fraud**

The Council is committed to prevent fraud in all its forms. A claimant who tries to make a claim to the Welfare Provision Scheme fraudulently 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 Council 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 sanctions against future claims or if appropriate criminal proceedings.

## **11. Policy Review**

The Deputy Chief Executive, in compliance with the Council's delegated responsibilities, shall review this document periodically, and with the Executive Member for Finance and Resources, amend it as appropriate.

## **Appendix 1**

### **Carers Emergency Fund**

Support is available to carers, including those households where a child or young person is the carer, to ensure the ongoing health and wellbeing of both the carer and the person who needs care. This could be travel or transport costs, including taxis, furniture or white goods needed as a result of the disability or caring needs or emergency funds for food, food delivery and fuel.

There are two criteria that must be met before an application form can be submitted (normally only 1 award over a rolling 12-month period):

The carer must be in some form of financial hardship

- Household on a low income and unable to afford a replacement item
- Household has no savings that they can access to replace the item
- There has been a recent change in financial circumstances e.g. recent unemployment, changes to benefits, reduction in working hours

The carer needs the item or grant immediately

- White goods or furniture broken or damaged and is not fulfilling its function
- Carer needs funds within the month to meet their needs

All carers wanting to apply for the Carers Emergency Fund must contact the Carers Manchester Contact Point (CMCP) on 0161 543 8000. Their request will be assessed by the CMCP and an application form will be submitted on their behalf. Unsupported applications will be declined.

## Appendix 2

### Household Support Fund

For the period that the Government's Household Support Fund budget is provided during 2024/25 Cost of Living support is available to vulnerable residents in the form of emergency funds for utility bills or to help meet other essential needs. Awards will be made based on the financial parameters set out in the main WPS scheme, however two payments (instead of one) may be approved within a 12-month period.

Awards will be prioritised for vulnerable residents and households who have not received other HSF targeted support provided in the form of bank payments or Post Office Vouchers. Residents and households who have received other HSF targeted support may receive support dependent upon the presenting circumstances and availability of WPS funds.

HSF eligibility criteria is the same as that described in the main WPS scheme, aside from also providing support for working residents on low incomes who are identified and signposted to the scheme by the Cost-of-Living Advice Line.

Households likely to be in the most need include:

- families with children of all ages;
- large families;
- single-income families;
- disabled people;
- Pensioners;
- unpaid carers;
- care leavers.