



**Coventry City Council**  
**Community Support Grant Policy**

**Last updated April 2023**

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## **1. Background**

The December 2010 White Paper - 'Universal Credit: welfare that works', set out the Government's reform plans for the Social Fund. The changes resulted in the abolition of the previous system of discretionary payments. In their place from April 2013 there was a combination of a new locally based scheme which replaced crisis loans and community care grants, and a new nationally administered advance of benefit facility that replaced alignment crisis loans and budgeting loans.

The locally based scheme was devolved to the Local Authority and came into effect from 1 April 2013. There was no requirement to replicate the previous crisis loan or community care grant schemes. Individual Local Authorities were given the funding and the flexibility to redesign the emergency provision for vulnerable groups according to local circumstances, in order to meet severe hardship in the most appropriate way.

## **Funding**

For 2013/14 and 2014/15, the Council received specific funding to administer a scheme. Since April 2015 funding for Local Welfare Provision is part of the Local Government Settlement and is subject to local decisions as part of Annual Budget Setting. Once the fund has been exhausted for the respective financial year, there will be no further awards.

## **2. The main features of Community Support Grants are that:**

- The scheme is purely discretionary; a customer does not have a statutory right to an award;
- No cash awards will be made.
- Awards will be made by the Council directly ordering goods;
- The amount that can be paid out by a council in any financial year will be determined by the amount of funding agreed. Once the fund has been exhausted for the respective financial year, there will be no further awards.

## **3. Policy Purpose**

The main purpose of the scheme will be to support vulnerable people, experiencing financial difficulties. The award is intended to support a return to, or allow a person to remain in the community, or to ease exceptional pressure on families

Each case will be treated strictly on its merits and all customers will receive equal and fair treatment 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.

The Benefits Service is committed to working with other Council departments, the local voluntary sector, registered social landlords and other stakeholders in the city to maximise entitlement to all available state benefits, charitable funds and grants, this will be reflected in the administration of the Community Support Grant Scheme.

This scheme is not intended to replicate or take over the responsibility of statutory agencies.

This scheme is not intended to replace items that are damaged, broken or worn out.

Customers will be referred to other relevant departments if applicable, such as Housing, Adult Social Care or Children's Social Care. In addition, details of any other sources of funding will be provided to the applicant where appropriate.

#### **4. Objectives**

Decisions under the scheme must be made in accordance with the principles of good decision making and decision makers should act fairly, reasonably and consistently.

The Council will consider making a Community Support Grant to all customers who meet the qualifying criteria as specified within the scheme. The Service 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;
- helping those who are trying to help themselves;
- keep families together;
- support the vulnerable in the local community;
- helping people through personal and difficult events.

#### **5. Who can claim a Community Support Grant**

A Community Support Grant (CSG) will be considered for vulnerable people in financial crisis, for a range of expenses including white goods and essential furniture. The award is intended to support a return to, or allow a person to remain in the community, or to ease exceptional pressure on families.

Customers will be referred to other relevant departments if applicable, such as Customer Services, Housing, Adult Social Care or Children's Social Care. In addition, details of any other sources of funding will be provided to the applicant where appropriate.

An applicant must be:

- A resident of Coventry. However consideration will be given to those fleeing domestic violence or resettling to the City.
- A person in receipt of, or be expected to receive, Income Support, Income Based Jobseekers Allowance, Income Related Employment Support Allowance, Universal Credit or any type of Pension Credit

It must be established for all awards that the need cannot be met from another source.

## **6. Eligibility Criteria**

Applicants may receive a Support Grant if they are:

- receiving Universal Credit, Income Support, Income Based Jobseekers Allowance, Income Related Employment Support Allowance or any type of Pension Credit;

### **AND**

- leaving accommodation in which they received significant and substantial care and supervision and expect to be discharged within 6 weeks and be expected to receive one of the benefits indicated above. Not only must the customer be leaving such an establishment, but also establishing themselves in the community. Both the time spent in the accommodation and the level of individual care and supervision provided will be taken into consideration when making a decision.

### **OR**

- To help the applicant (or family member/carer) to remain living in the community where there is a high risk of the person needing to enter residential accommodation.

A Support Grant may also be made if this will help a customer to stay in the community rather than enter accommodation to receive care. One of the factors considered is how immediate the likelihood is of going into such accommodation, and whether the type of item or service asked for would prevent this happening. Some examples are where a Community Support Grant may help to:

- improve an applicant's existing living conditions
- enable them to move to accommodation which is more suitable
- move nearer to someone who can offer them support
- To help the applicant (or family member / carer) to set up home as part of a planned resettlement programme (following an unsettled way of life).

Support Grants are intended primarily to help people live as independent a life as possible in Coventry. A Support Grant may be awarded to applicants who:

- have been living in the community in accommodation which does not provide a sufficient level of care or supervision
- are being housed in permanent accommodation (or temporary accommodation which will lead to permanent accommodation) as a part of a programme of resettlement

People who have been without a settled way of life may have been:

- using a night shelter
- staying in a hostel
- sleeping on the streets or in a makeshift shelter on the streets using an emergency winter shelter
- using a temporary supported lodging scheme
- staying in temporary accommodation provided by the Home Office pending a decision on their application for asylum in this country
- using a combination of these

Support Grants can help with costs to ease exceptional pressures for a customer, or/and their family. Some examples of situations that may give rise to exceptional pressure are:

- there is, or has been, a breakdown of relationships within the family, (including domestic violence)
- domestic upheaval because of unforeseen circumstances such as house fire, flooding or other disaster.

OR

- To assist with travel expenses to visit a relative who is terminally ill or a relative's funeral or to visit a child who is living with another parent pending a court decision.

The above is not an exhaustive list

### **Applicants where a Community Support Grant scheme cannot provide support**

Due to the limited budget available there will be applications that the scheme cannot consider. This includes but is not limited to

- If you are not currently in receipt of a qualifying benefit which includes Income Support, Income based Job seekers allowance, Income related Employment & Support Allowance, Universal Credit or Pension Credit.
- If you are moving outside of the Coventry Local authority area
- If you are applying as your items are damaged/broken or worn-out and you require financial assistance in replacing these items.
- If you are moving from an unfurnished tenancy to another unfurnished tenancy.
- If you are applying for furniture items which are provided within the tenancy agreement.

Where support cannot be provided through the Community Support Grant scheme, we will provide additional information or signposting for service areas that may be able to help.

### **How to Apply**

An application for a Support Grant can be made online via the Council's web site. If you are not able to use the website, the team may offer to assist you making an application by telephone

### **Application made by customer**

For customers the following process will be followed:

- Customer completes and submits application form, either on-line or by phone
- An officer will assess the application and if the application is incomplete or further supporting evidence is required the team will call or write to the relevant services or the customer for the necessary information.
- Once all relevant information has been collected, the Benefits Service will aim to write to the customer with details of the decision and details of the review process within 14 days. Please note that this timescale may be longer during busy periods

- If successful, awards will be provided in line with the customer's needs.

### **Application made by Service Provider**

For service providers the following process will be followed:

- Customer contacts the service provider asking for assistance. Service providers complete their internal assessments and identifies that client may be eligible for Community Support Grant.
- Service provider supports client to complete the Community Support Grant application and submits this to Coventry City Council's Benefits Service.
- Once the application is received by the Benefits Service they will assess the application and if the application is incomplete or further supporting evidence is required the team will call or write to the relevant services or the customer for the necessary information.
- Once all relevant information has been collected, the Benefits Service will aim to write to the customer with details of the decision and details of the review process within 14 day. Please note that this timescale may be longer during busy periods
- If successful, awards will be provided in line with the customer's needs.

### **7. Supporting Information**

- The Benefits Service may request any reasonable evidence in support of an application for a CSG. Such requests will normally be made in writing although if an urgent application is being considered (such as a customer potentially being made homeless), this will be requested by phone.
- The customer will be asked to provide the evidence within 5 working days of a request being made although this will be extended in appropriate circumstances. Please note that this timescale may be longer during busy periods
- The Benefits Service reserves the right to verify any information or evidence provided by the customer in appropriate circumstances. Any such request will be essential to the decision-making process. If information is sourced from a support worker either the evidence will be scanned in or notes made against the client's record for transparency purposes.
- 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.
- The Benefits Service will 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 Community Support Grants 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.

### **8. Forms of Support Awards will be made for the provision of:**

- Furniture
- Furnishings
- Removal or storage charges
- Additional items as necessary (health/age/disability) including
  - White goods
  - Household goods

## **9. Award values**

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.

Savings will be considered as funds available to the customer to meet their immediate needs.

Once the fund has been exhausted for the respective financial year, there will be no further awards.

## **10. Deciding a Community Support Grant**

The Benefit Service will consider the full circumstances before deciding whether or not to award a CSG. In deciding whether to award a CSG, the following will be taken into account:

- Proximity of essential services relied upon by the customer and their partner to their home;
- The exceptional nature of the customer and their family's circumstances;
- Any reasons which make it necessary or especially desirable for the claimant to occupy the dwelling they currently reside in the view of the assessor;
- Will the payment of a CSG keep the family together, will it support a young person in the transition to adult life, or will it assist in the safeguarding of a vulnerable adult or child;
- The financial, medical and social circumstances of the customer and their household, if they are relevant to the CSG request;
- The income and essential expenditure of the customer and their household will be taken into account when considering the customer's income. When considering the customer's expenditure, the assessor may make enquiries with the customer to clarify details such as:
  - Any savings and investments held by the customer and their household, which could be used to help their financial situation;
  - Whether other family members external to the household help in any way towards the customer's financial expenditure;
  - Whether the customer and their household could reduce expenditure on non-essential items;
  - Whether the customer and their household are entitled to other welfare benefits but are not claiming them;
  - Whether a CSG would prevent homelessness;
  - Whether a CSG would help the customer being able to access or maintain employment, education or training;
  - Whether a CSG would prevent a move that would have detrimental effects on the customer and their household, for example children's schooling, health, support networks or employment;
  - Whether the customer is fleeing domestic abuse;
  - Whether the customer is a care leaver;
  - Whether the customer or other household member is subject to Social Services intervention;
  - Whether the customer or other member of their household is undertaking care duties for relatives in the area;

- Whether the customer is a returning ex-offender who is having difficulty in finding suitable accommodation;
- Whether the customer is a former member of the armed forces who is having difficulty in finding suitable accommodation;
- Any steps taken by the customer to help themselves;
- Financial advice they have sought to alleviate their situation, such as from Citizens Advice or Welfare Rights.

### **11. Method of award**

The Benefits Service will award a CSG by the direct ordering of the goods available through the scheme

### **12. Notification**

If a customer's application is unsuccessful, the Benefits Service will set out the reasons why this decision was made and explain the right of review. Notifications will include details of where a claimant may seek further assistance (such as Citizens Advice).

Where the application is successful, the Benefits Section will advise:

- What has been awarded;
- How, when and to whom the goods will be delivered;
- The right to request a review and how further assistance can be obtained;

### **13. Reviews**

If a customer is dissatisfied with a decision they can request a reconsideration of the decision as set out below:

- A customer (or their appointee or agent) who disagrees with a CSG decision may challenge the decision. Customers can ask for a review if they can demonstrate there has been a factual error based on the decision made or has new evidence which has come to light which was not provided with the original application. In either circumstance, the customer must provide the relevant details. Such review requests must be made in writing to the Council within one calendar month of the written CSG decision being issued to the customer.
- When a request is made, the Council will conduct a review of the decision and contact the customer in writing within 10 working days of the review request being received to advise whether the decision will be amended, and if so, details of the award. All reviews will be considered by another officer not involved in the original decision. Please note that this timescale may be longer during busy periods
- If the customer remains dissatisfied, the customer has the right to register a formal complaint through the Council's Complaint Procedure or to contact the Local Government Ombudsman to investigate a claim of maladministration.

### **14. Monitoring arrangements and managing the Community Support Grant fund**

The Benefits Service will undertake monitoring of the number, amount and period of CSG awards in relation to the available CSG budget. The purpose is to ensure there are sufficient funds to meet demands on the CSG budget throughout the financial year. Once the fund has been exhausted for the respective financial year, there will be no further awards. The Benefits Service will also monitor cases where a CSG 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 no one is subject to disproportionate adverse treatment because they had a protected characteristic.

### **15. Publicity**

The Community Support Grant Scheme will be publicised on the Council's website and the Benefit Service will ensure that all relevant stakeholders and partnership organisations are aware of the scheme.

### **16. Fraud**

Coventry City Council is committed to the fight against fraud in all its forms. A customer who tries to fraudulently claim a CSG 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.

### **17. Accessibility**

Hard copies or alternative versions of any document can be made available where necessary to meet an individual's needs. Please contact Coventry City Council, Council House, Earl Street, Coventry, CV1 5RR or telephone the Council directly on 0500 834 333

### **18. Contacting us in an emergency**

If our telephone lines are closed an out of hour's emergency the Council's Emergency Duty Team can be contacted:

- If a child is at risk of abuse, harm or neglect, contact the out of hours Emergency Duty Team on 024 7683 3800 or contact the Police on 0845 113 5000
- If an adult is at risk of abuse, harm or danger to themselves or others, contact the Emergency Duty Team on 024 7683 3800 or contact the Police on 0845 113 5000
- If you are homeless or think you are at risk of being homeless call 0500 834333

Version Control \_\_\_\_\_

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G Cowley	09/08/2012
C Storey	10/08/2012
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G Cowley	25/10/2012
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T Savill	28/11/2012
Health, Social Care and Welfare Reform Scrutiny Board (Scrutiny Board 5)	12/12/2012
Cabinet	08/01/2013
Council	15/01/2013
K Gist	14/03/2016
K Gist	19/09/2017
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