

## **C19 Local Support Grant – EALING POLICY**

### **1. Introduction**

The coronavirus (COVID-19) continues to have a significant impact on individual households and their budgets especially on lowest paid families, many being affected by unemployment or reduced income due to the pandemic. School holidays can be a particularly challenging times for these families.

Scheme was originally set up by the Government in November 2020 as a one off support to help vulnerable households during winter months to elevate impact of the pandemic. Funding of £170 million was made available to Local Authorities under the COVID Winter Grant Scheme.

The duration of the scheme was initially set for 4 months which covered a period from 1 December 2020 to 31 March 2021. Following the initial period, there were further two extensions of the scheme, one for period covering 1 April 2021 to 16 April 2021 and for additional period between 17 April and 20 June 2021.

From April, the scheme has been renamed as Covid19 Local Support Grant and there has been no changes to eligibility criteria.

On Tuesday, 21 June, DWP announced a further extension of the scheme to run between 21 June and 30 September 2021 with additional funding being made available to all local authorities.

Additional allocation for Ealing under the extension of the scheme for period from 21 June to 30 September 2021 is £1,006,100.79.

### **2. Objectives**

The objective of the Covid19 Local Support Grant Scheme is to provide support to vulnerable households and families with children particularly affected by the pandemic throughout the winter period where alternative sources of assistance may be unavailable.

When administering this scheme, The Council has followed principles laid out in DWP guidance as below:

- The Council use discretion on how to identify and support those most in need
- use the funding from 21 June 2021 up to 30 September to meet immediate needs and help those who are struggling to afford food and utility bills (heating, cooking, lighting) and water for household purposes (including drinking, washing, cooking, central heating, sewerage and sanitary purposes), or other related essentials. This includes payments made, or committed to, by

the Authorities or any person acting on behalf of the Authority, 21 June 2021 up to 30 September.

- work together with other departments within Council including, where necessary and appropriate, other local services, such as social and care workers to help identify and support households within the scope of the scheme.

When deciding how to help people, the Council should consider:

- how you plan to provide support to vulnerable households, in other words, paying into bank accounts, use of cash and vouchers
- any risks associated with these payment methods

The following guidelines have been issued by DWP on how the funding should be used:

- at least 80% of the total funding will be ring-fenced to support households with children, with up to 20% of the total funding to other households experiencing, or at risk of experiencing, poverty during the pandemic. This may include households not currently in receipt of DWP welfare benefits.
- at least 80% of the total funding will be ring-fenced to provide support with food, energy and water bills for household purposes (including drinking, washing, cooking, central heating, and sanitary purposes) and sewerage, or other essentials. Within this condition there is flexibility about the proportion of support allocated to food and to bills.
- up to 20% of the total funding can be used to provide support with other essentials clearly linked to the scheme conditions (including sanitary products, warm clothing, soap, blankets; boiler service/repair; purchase of equipment including fridges, freezers, ovens, etc.), in recognition that a range of costs may arise which directly affect a household's ability to afford or access food, energy and water.

### **3. Legislation**

This policy is developed in line with DWP guidance noting that as per guidance the Covid Winter Grant scheme is being classified as Local Welfare Provision (LWP) and local authorities (LAs) who have signed and returned the relevant section (Annex C) of the DWP/LA Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) have legal permission to access DWP's Searchlight portal. This portal provides information on individual citizen's entitlement to (and confirms receipt of) DWP welfare benefits. Therefore, this data can be used to help Authorities identify those families and individuals to whom to target this support.

#### **4. Qualifying criteria and awards**

The Council has flexibility to deliver the support in a variety of different ways, including direct cash payments, vouchers, giving meals to those in need or boosting funding for organisations already doing so.

Council also has the flexibility to identify which vulnerable households are in most need of support and apply their own discretion when identifying eligibility.

The Council can request applications for support or can proactively identify households who may benefit, or can take a mixture of the two approaches. There is no requirement for Authorities to undertake a means test or conduct a benefit check unless this specifically forms part of the Authority's local eligibility criteria.

In order to maximise the grant for support payments to residents of Ealing and to keep the administration of the grant to minimum, the Council will administer the grant as three different elements:

##### **Element 1: Targeting families eligible for FSMs where eligibility is based on low income (excludes universal support).**

The Council will automatically issue awards to parents of children eligible to free school meals where their eligibility is based on low income excludes universal infant free school meals, which are not income related.

The Council will use the Free School Meals database to identify those eligible.

The Council will then automatically issue food vouchers to families identified as entitled to free school meals to cover the 6-week period of school holidays.

The vouchers will be issued as a one off award to the amount of £90 per eligible child.

##### **Element 2: Targeting families with children under the age of 5:**

The Council will use its Council Tax Reduction and Housing Benefit data to identify households with children under 5 who would not qualify for element 1 of the support and issue a payment as below:

London wide agreement has been reached that each borough will support the children attending the schools in the borough. This is to ensure that all children eligible for free school meals are being supported.

Provide support to the value of £65 in one off payment to families with children under 5 as identified through Council Tax Reduction (CTR), Housing Benefit (HB) and Temporary Accommodation (TA) databases.

The vouchers will be distributed electronically by Hawk Incentives Limited. Where this is not possible, The Council will issue vouchers via other means necessary, i.e. text or letter.

**Element 3: Targeting vulnerable households without children, households who do not qualify for automatic vouchers and those who need additional support other essential items.**

Local Welfare Assistance (LWA) will provide support to other vulnerable households in the borough and will support for families with other essentials including sanitary products, warm clothing, soap, blankets, boiler/service repair; purchase of equipment including fridges, freezers, ovens, etc.

The customer will be required to make an application for local welfare assistance and the application will be decided in accordance with the existing eligibility criteria for LWA.

Where a customer makes an application for a boiler/service repairs, two quotes will be required before the final decision on the award is made. The payments for boiler/service repairs will be capped at maximum of £1,500. Alternatively, the team may refer the case to a handyman scheme under Healthy Homes initiative and if the boiler cannot be repaired, the Healthy Homes may assist the customer in getting a boiler replaced under their scheme.

If the property is rented, it is generally the responsibility of the landlord to carry out boiler repairs and replacements, therefore awards towards boiler repairs will only be considered for owner occupiers.

The awards will be determined under the current eligibility criteria of the Council's Local Welfare Assistance team.

## **5. Identification of cases and application process**

The Council will identify families eligible for support from its own records and according to eligibility criteria set out in paragraph 4.

Residents will also be able to make further application to local welfare assistance for other essential items as specified in element 3.

## **6. Evidence/verification**

For elements 1 and 2 the Council will issue payments automatically and no further evidence or verification will be required under the scheme as the identity and other information would have been verified for free school meals and benefit purposes.

The Council will undertake verification of Local Welfare Assistance applications in accordance with existing verification processes for LWA scheme.

## **7. Decisions**

One off vouchers will be issued to those identified as eligible through council records.

Local Welfare Assistance claims will be paid under the LWA current eligibility criteria and timescales.

Notifications of awards will be issued either via email or where an email address is not available, customers will be notified via letter.

## **8. Backdating requests**

There will be no backdating of entitlement to the C19 Local Support scheme and only those who meet the eligibility criteria at the time of issuing payments will be issued with awards.

## **9. Fraud**

As the Council is identifying eligible customers from its own records, the risk of fraud is low.

Local Welfare Assistance applicants will have the information verified under the current LWA process.

Blackhawk Network will provide the Council with reports on the codes redeemed which can then be verified against the records of codes issued.

## **10. Publicity**

Publicity will be provided directly via schools. Further communication about the scheme will be issued through Ealing Council's media as and when required.

## **11. Appeals**

There is no statutory right of appeal to the automatic awards made to recipients identified by the Council as requiring additional support.

Any award will be at the absolute discretion of the Chief Finance Officer, in accordance with the award criteria, and his decision will be final.

Those who make an application for support through Local Welfare Assistance have a right to ask for the decision to be reviewed under the current LWA policy.

## 12. Funding

Ealing Council's allocation for Covid 19 Local Support funding is £1,006,100.79. There is no separate grant towards administration costs and some of the grant can be used towards administering the scheme as long as the cost is 'reasonable'. The administration costs can include: staff costs, advertising and publicity, web page design, printing applications and small IT changes to facilitate MI production.

Any unspent funds will have to be paid back to DWP.

The following guidelines have been issued by DWP on how the funding should be used:

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## 13. Management Information Returns

Authorities are required to make one Statement of Grant Usage and management information (MI) return – **see the Grant Determination**. The deadline for completing this return is shown in the table below.

MI return	Reporting period
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Interim MI return	From: 17 April 2021	To: 20 June 2021	<b>Deadline:</b> 09 July 2021
Final MI return	From: 17 April 2021	To: 30 September 2021	<b>Deadline:</b> 22/10/2021

Completed MI returns should be sent to [lawelfare.pdt@dwp.gov.uk](mailto:lawelfare.pdt@dwp.gov.uk)

An interim MI return is required for the previous CLSG for the period 17 April to 20 June 2021. The interim MI return will be used to determine eligible spend to 20 June 2021 and an interim grant payment will be made to your LA for this period when the information in your return have been verified.

A final MI return is required showing total spend from 17 April to 30 September 2021. The final MI return will be used to determine eligible spend to 30 September 2021 and a final grant payment will be made to your LA for this period when the information in your return have been verified.

Authorities should use the standard MI reporting template provided, which incorporates the Statement of Grant Usage.

The submissions need to be signed off by Chief Finance Officer.