



Wigan♥
Council

Local Welfare Support Policy

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Version control

Version	Date	Notes
1	March 2019	
2	April 2020	Updated following review and COVID-19
3	January 2026	Updated following review

Equalities and administration

The Council is committed to ensuring equality and fairness. Equality means ensuring that everyone has the same opportunities and is treated fairly, regardless of their background, characteristics, or circumstances. It's about removing barriers that prevent people from accessing services, resources, support or chances to succeed.

This incorporates everyone, regardless of their race, gender, age, religion or belief, sexual orientation, marital or civil partnership status or disability in line with the principles set out in the Equalities Act 2010.

This policy is administered within the Income Maximisation team - Customer Support, and will be regularly reviewed to ensure it continues to meet resident and community crisis and welfare needs, alongside taking into account the requirements and impact of any new or existing support schemes provided by central government.

Purpose and aims of the policy

The Local Welfare Support Policy details how Wigan Council administer emergency support provision to residents facing exceptional hardship or crisis.

It aims to prevent escalation into severe poverty, homelessness or health deterioration, while promoting fairness, dignity and resilience for all residents across the Wigan Borough.

This policy will operate in line with our missions under [Progress with Unity](#);

Mission 1 - Create fair opportunities for all children, families, residents & businesses

- **Reducing financial inequality and alleviating poverty**, by providing emergency support for essentials (food, fuel, household items) to those in crisis and providing immediate relief, whilst identifying the

cause of crisis and supporting residents to access longer term support based on their needs.

- **Supporting improved health and wellbeing** by preventing hardship that can lead to poor physical and mental health.
- **Promoting inclusion** by ensuring vulnerable residents have access to basic needs, enabling them to participate in community life.

Mission 2 - Make all our towns and neighbourhoods flourish for those who live and work in them

- **Strengthening community resilience** by connecting people to local support networks (food banks, advice services, voluntary groups)
- **Protecting neighbourhood stability** by sustaining tenancies and safeguarding residents in their own homes, preventing homelessness and severe poverty, which can destabilise communities.
- **Enhancing trust and partnership working** by working alongside residents and local organisations to deliver help where it's needed most, ensuring residents can access effective information and advice

Eligibility

To access Local Welfare Support customers will need to meet one or more of the following eligibility criteria:

- be a person 16 years of age or over and living in the Wigan Borough
- lived in the borough of Wigan for at least six weeks prior to applying, except for people:
 - released from prison
 - fleeing domestic or gang violence
 - living in council temporary accommodation or registered care projects
- be without enough resources to meet their immediate short-term needs
- applications from single people living with family members, will only be considered in exceptional circumstances, for example, the family members are unable to assist due to the demands of their own financial, health or general circumstances.

In addition, customers will need to meet the following eligibility criteria to access a Domestic Relief Furniture Package:

- be experiencing a crisis or an emergency

- being resettled into the community following a period in institutional or residential care, for example leaving prison or supported accommodation
- in need of support to prevent them from entering institutional or residential care
- have a family under exceptional pressure
- setting up home as part of a planned resettlement

The Income Maximisation team will consider the customers full circumstances before deciding whether to award a Domestic Relief Furniture Package.

If a customer applies for support and they do not meet the criteria for Domestic Relief Furniture Package they will be sign posted to Trust Fund Applications, local charities and other partner organisations. Other local and national support streams will also be considered at the time of application.

Referrals from other organisations and partners are accepted via our [online application form](#)

Referring organisations are expected to carry out an assessment of the customer's needs in line with all eligibility criteria prior to submitting the referral.

Customers may be referred to other relevant council departments and partner organisations where applicable.

Customers will not be eligible for Local Welfare Support if they are:

- deemed to be depriving themselves of income by choosing not to apply for benefits they are entitled or refusing to engage with the Income Maximisation team
- a Looked After Child being supported by the Local Authority
- applying because they have had their benefit disallowed and have not applied for a hardship payment from the Department for Work and Pensions
- applying because they are subject to a benefit sanction and have not applied for a hardship payment from the Department for Work and Pensions
- subject to a sanction from the Department for Work and Pensions and an award will undermine a sanction
- able to access money or savings that allow them to access the provision for themselves

- resident in a care home or other supported accommodation, unless there are plans for discharge within eight weeks
- a hospital inpatient unless there are plans for discharge within eight weeks
- lawfully detained unless there are plans for release within eight weeks
- a member of a religious order who is being fully maintained by it
- have applied for assistance with items for independent living in the last 28 days and there is no significant change in circumstances
- can meet the need from another source, for example, if the Council has a statutory duty to meet an expense such as Disabled Facilities Grant under Section 24(1)(a) of the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996, or under the provisions of Section 17 of the Children Act 1989.

Application process

Applications for Local Welfare Support should be made on our website at www.wigan.gov.uk/LocalWelfareSupport

Alternatively you can call 01942 705221, Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm.

Support to apply can also be accessed at Wigan or Leigh Life Centres, or at any of our 15 Libraries across the borough. Public network computers are available at these locations and a free phone is also available in Wigan and Leigh Life Centres.

Regular events to support residents to access all support and eligible funding based on their individual circumstances take place in community venues across the borough regularly. For details of the latest events taking place in your area please visit www.wigan.gov.uk/HelpToClaim

Support and Assistance

If an individual is entitled to immediate Local Welfare Support they will be provided with one of, or a combination of, the following support;

- referred onto one of our partner organisations for food support
- provided with support to access gas and/or electricity
- provided with furniture support

Regardless of entitlement to the above support, advisors will ensure that their advice, information and referrals for further support to assist with the wider holistic needs of the individual which includes:

- Income Maximisation and benefit advice, ensuring applicants are supported to maximise their incomes via both local and national

funding streams, consider the impact of ongoing and potential future Welfare Reforms

- financial advice involving budgeting, financial education, debt advice and utility switching
- support to employment or training
- effective signposting to other more appropriate assistance as part of the coordinated and holistic approach to supporting residents needs

Food support

We work in partnership with organisations and agencies to provide food parcels for customers and their families who find themselves in crisis and have no means of providing food for themselves.

To reflect the rules of the Trussell Trust Foodbanks we can provide up to three parcel vouchers in any six month period to Customers in food crisis. If there are issues with Universal Credit payments, then the number of vouchers may be as many as six consecutive food vouchers.

The council will consider each case based on individual circumstances and referrals will only be made once the root cause of the customer's problem is identified and, where necessary, the appropriate referrals to partners and external organisations have been made.

Where two food parcels have been provided in any twelve month period customers will be referred for money advice to ensure appropriate support is be offered.

If customers do not engage with referrals future support may not be considered.

We will take sanction circumstances into account when considering whether to support customers and may consult with the Department for Work and Pensions as appropriate and the customer will also be advised to claim a hardship payment where possible.

Fuel and Utility support

Where appropriate we will:

- issue crisis heating payments, enabling customers to pay for some short-term emergency heating
- ask the customer to provide an up-to-date bank statement before a heating payment can be issued where appropriate to do so
- issue a customer a maximum of two emergency heating vouchers in any twelve-month period, although discretion will be applied to each individual case

- refer to [AWARM](#) - Cases will be considered based on individual circumstances. A referral will only be made once the cause of the customer's problem is understood and any identified support referrals have been made that improve long term outcomes for customers.

Furniture support

Person Criteria

To be eligible for furniture the person must:

- Be 16 years of age or over and living in the Wigan Borough
- Lived in Wigan for at least six weeks prior to applying, residents released from prisoners, fleeing domestic or gang violence, living in council temporary accommodation or registered care projects are excluded from this requirement
- In receipt of either: Universal Credit, Income Support, Jobseekers Allowance (Income Based type only), Employment and Support Allowance (Income Related type only) or any type of Pension Credit
- Not be subject to immigration control or have no recourse to public funds
- Be without sufficient resources to meet your or your family's immediate short-term needs
- Have demonstrated the need cannot be met by another source
- If an individual is in receipt of benefits and they are sanctioned, they would not be eligible for the scheme unless in exceptional circumstances
- If a person is eligible for benefits and chooses not to apply for benefits, then they would be excluded from the scheme as they are deemed as depriving themselves of income

Applications from single people living with other family members will not be awarded unless there are exceptional circumstances, such as someone who lives at home and receives support from their family who are unable to assist due to the demands of their own financial, health or general circumstances.

The items classed as being 'essential' within the various furniture types are listed below:

Beds and bedding	Single bed with mattress and bedding and/or Double bed with mattress and bedding
Seating items	2 seat sofa or 3 seat sofa or 3-piece suite and/or Dining table with 2 chairs and/or Dining table with 3 chairs and/or Dining table with 6 chairs
Crockery and cooking essentials	Packages consisting of essential pots, pans and cutlery

Referral Sources

Referrals to a Third-Party Organisation or Charity

If a customer applies for support and they don't meet the criteria for Domestic Relief Furniture items or don't have enough income to source items themselves at a low cost e.g. via a social media marketplace or free local community websites, they will be provided with information about organisations or charities that could help with one off furniture items or items that aren't included within the domestic furniture relief package.

If a customer applies for support and they don't meet the criteria for Domestic Relief Furniture items or don't have enough income to source items themselves at a low cost due to outstanding debts, they will be referred to Citizens Advice for support to manage outstanding debts.

Charities are under no obligation to provide such items and any arrangement for the provision of furniture will be between the individual and the charity.

Referrals to Unify Credit Union for a Low-Cost Loan

If a customer does not meet the criteria for a Domestic Furniture Relief Package and they are assessed as potentially having enough income to afford some, but not all, essential items of furniture for themselves, then they will be referred to Unify Credit Union to assess eligibility for a low-cost loan to source the remaining items.

If a customer presents in crisis and their income and expenditure shows they are making payments to a high street credit store, they will be

encouraged to send the item back and take out a low-cost loan for the item with Unify Credit Union at a significantly reduced rate.

Personal information such as name, address and description of referrals will be shared with Unify Credit Union.

Income Maximisation

Our Income Maximisation team play a crucial role in helping residents improve their financial resilience and wellbeing, supporting residents to access awards that improve their longer-term financial resilience.

The team support residents to maximise their income by ensuring they receive all benefits, discounts, and entitlements they are eligible for.

The team support residents by unlocking unclaimed income, leading to improved health and wellbeing and reduced stress and hardship, avoiding the need for crisis support and building long term resilience.

All applications for Local Welfare Assistance will be considered by the Income Maximisation team and residents will be offered the appropriate support via benefit checks to ensure they are claiming all entitlements.

Failure to engage with the Income Maximisation team or relevant partner organisations may result in further or repeat applications for support being declined.

Expectations, exclusions and repeat applications

In order to access Local Welfare Support, residents are expected to engage with all relevant support processes offered by the council and/or partner organisations. Failure to engage may result in the refusal of further support being available until the relevant referral has been satisfied.

This policy and support under Local Welfare Assistance is intended to support with crisis and does not cover all day-to-day or usual/expected expenses.

The following are examples of circumstances that are excluded from assistance:

- expected or usual maternity expenses
- funeral expenses
- cold weather Payments
- Winter Fuel Payments
- expenses or services that are provided by another organisation or statutory body
- housing costs, repairs or improvements

- work related expenses
- education or training expenses
- legal or court fees, fines etc.
- non-receipt or loss of benefit payments
- vehicle and travel costs

Individuals are expected to manage their day today finances and take steps to budget and manage their household income.

Repeat requests for Local Welfare Support may not be considered for:

- the same set of circumstances in the last six months
- where advice has been ignored or not sought as advised
- where the individual has not taken steps to remedy the situation
- where the circumstances could have been avoided or were because of reckless or deliberate behaviour
- where the customer has not co-operated with the Council or other public bodies, partners and organisations

The above lists are not exhaustive, and consideration will be given to individual circumstances on their own merits.

Crisis Loans for white goods and resettlement packages are no longer available; the Local Welfare Support Service will refer customers to local charities.

We do not provide Local Welfare Support to cover shortfalls in Council Tax Reduction awards or reductions in Housing Benefit or Universal Credit entitlement, including those associated under occupancy rules also known as Bedroom Tax.

Customers may be able to receive support with these costs via the Council's [Council Tax Reduction](#) or [Housing Payment](#) schemes and support to maximise customer entitlement is offered via our Income Maximisation team as outlined above.

Funding

Funding for Local Welfare Support is limited and as such the budgetary position needs to be considered when making an award. It is expected that demand may exceed funding and therefore not all applications can be approved. Referring organisations are expected to carry out an assessment of the customer's needs in line with all eligibility criteria prior to submitting the referral.

The Local Welfare Support fund must last the entirety of the financial year and therefore if there is substantial demand on the fund, only high priority cases may be considered for an award.

Alternative provisions

Administration of Local Welfare Support under this policy will be conducted collaboratively alongside the administration of other support streams, introduced either locally, or nationally, by the UK Government or organisations such as the Department for Work and Pensions.

Details of alternative assistance which may be available can be found on our website at www.wigan.gov.uk/hereforyou and www.wigan.gov.uk/welfaresupport

Policy review

This Policy will be reviewed annually, or as new national and local policies are required to be considered. Any changes will be in accordance with best practice to ensure that the service continues to meet the stated outcomes, objectives, needs of the local community and aligns to our missions under Progress with Unity. This Policy will be published and available to view on the Council's website.