

**Manchester City Council
Report for Information**

Report to: Health Scrutiny Committee – 18 December 2014

Subject: Welfare Provision Scheme 2014/15

Report of: City Treasurer

Summary

These reports provides details of how the Council's Welfare Provision Scheme is working, including performance data and spend against budget for the first half of the financial year.

It also provides details of a recent judicial review and the current government advice in terms of funding schemes for the 2015/16 financial year.

Recommendation

To note the information provided on how the scheme has been running since its introduction in April 2013.

Wards Affected: All

Community Strategy Spine	Summary of the contribution to the strategy
Performance of the economy of the region and sub region	Tackling inequalities and personal debt within Manchester society to reduce dependence on loan sharks and payday borrowing.
Reaching full potential in education and employment	The changes in the 2014/5 are intended to support residents in the transition into work and to sustain employment.
Individual and collective self esteem – mutual respect	The scheme provides support to residents with minimum essential requirements.
Neighbourhoods of Choice	The scheme supports residents to stay in their own home and to sustain tenancies. Reduction in crime and homelessness associated with crisis, ensuring residents build networks, friendships and feelings of personal and collective effectiveness which promote health and well-being and support the ability to stay in the community.

Full details are in the body of the report, along with any implications for:

- Equal Opportunities Policy
 - Risk Management
 - Legal Considerations
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Financial Consequences – Revenue

There was an under spend in 2013/14 of £1.37m. This is added to an earmarked reserve and will be used to fund a scheme in future years.

The indicative funding for 2014/15 is £2.72m. This is non- ringfenced grant and the Council is under no duty to provide a scheme. The Council has determined to do so and is delivering a scheme that meets the core principles of the scheme and supports Council priorities and objectives.

Government have indicated that in future years there will not be a specific grant to provide support for such schemes.

Financial Consequences – Capital

None

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Background documents (available for public inspection):

The following documents cover the background to this report and have been relied upon in preparing the report. Copies of the background documents are available up to four years after the date of the meeting. If you would like a copy please contact one of the contact officers above.

- Local Welfare Scheme report to Health Scrutiny December 2012 and Executive January 2013. Local Welfare Provision 2013/14
- Agenda and Minutes of Executive, December 2013, Changes to Local Welfare Provision
- DWP, Ministerial Correspondence, Steve Webb Minister of State for Work and Pensions, Programme funding for new local welfare provision (27 January 2014)
- Local Welfare Scheme report to Health Scrutiny and Executive, March 2014

1. Introduction and background

The Council's Welfare Provision Scheme has been operational since 2 April 2013. The new scheme replaced the DWP Community Care Grants and Crisis Loan schemes which were abolished at the end of March 2013.

The scheme was set up and agreed with the intention that it would be reviewed as take up, impact and customer reaction was monitored and evaluated and to take into account funding levels agreed by government (funding has only been guaranteed for two years - 2013/14 and 2014/15).

This report provides performance data for the first half of the 2014/15 financial year.

2. The core scheme

2.1 The original scheme

The scheme agreed by the Executive to provide support for 2013/14 was as follows:

The Welfare Provision Scheme provides financial support to Manchester residents who are suffering financial hardship.

The Welfare Provision Scheme supports residents with three 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; 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.

To qualify for support applicants must be:

- 16 or over; and
- A Manchester resident; where a resident lives in the area covered by the Council; or is moving into this area due to domestic violence or as part of a witness protection scheme.
- In receipt of or has claimed and likely to be entitled to*:
 - Income Support,
 - Income Based Jobseeker's Allowance,
 - Income Related Employment Support Allowance; or
 - Guaranteed Pension Credit.
 - Has no capital or savings.

*This is for people who may be moving due to domestic violence or as part of a witness protection scheme.

The scheme agreed by the Council offers support to residents accessing the scheme in the form of:

- (i) Grants:
 - Re-housing and resettlement support – Provision of minimum essential furniture items. In most cases this will be limited to the provision of beds, bedding packs and a cooker or microwave depending on household composition. In some cases (where health or family circumstances require) the Council will also provide a fridge and a washing machine.
 - Support to stay within their home – provision of essential furniture or equipment items;
- (ii) Loans following a crisis or emergency – these are low value, low interest repayable loans that are delivered by the Manchester Credit Union and the South Manchester Credit Union.

The Council's scheme operates as an on line application process supported by a range of Council and partner organisations providing self service and supported service (67 venues across the city). The service works with partner agencies and provides briefings and awareness sessions. Special arrangements have been made with the Probation Service, prisons and for hospital residents.

Decisions are made by trained assessment officers with the majority of decisions and any follow up being progressed by phone. The system has a review process to ensure that decisions are made in the spirit of the Council's policy.

2.2 Fuel payments

In December 2013, the Executive agreed an extension to the scheme to provide emergency fuel grants to respond to requests for support from residents. The increased offer has been operational since January 2014. The Council provides a one off grant to support residents with an emergency fuel purchase or to avoid disconnection. Where possible the Council tries to ensure that payments are made by topping up cards direct or making payments direct to the supplier to avoid disconnection.

To qualify households are normally required to have the same income details as described in the original scheme and within the household there are:

- Children under 5; or
- A member of the family with a disability or serious health needs; or
- Over pension age ; or
- Other vulnerability issues for which each case would be considered on own merits.

The scheme also allows a payment to be made in other circumstances based on the individual merits of the application and providing that the Council is satisfied that the resident is in serious fuel poverty and is determined to be vulnerable.

2.3 Changes to the original scheme during operation and for the second year of operation

Changes to the core offer have been made to best meet the needs of residents and to support the core objectives of the scheme. This was based on resident and stakeholder need and feedback and because the budget allowed the extension to the agreed scheme.

The changes made are within the spirit of the original policy agreement and extend the offer to support residents to settle in to their new home using the Council's buying power to source and supply essential home-ware, sustain new homes and tenancies and to support residents' health and well being.

The changes to the core offer have included:

- Provision of bedding and linen packs, including bath and hand towels for each household member and full bedding packs.
- The offer being changed from a microwave to a cooker for single people if preferred.
- The provision of kitchen starter packs that includes all essential kitchen utensils and pans, crockery, cutlery and glasses and basic cleaning equipment.
- That the core offer for all resettlement awards includes the provision of a fridge-freezer and a three seat sofa, including single people. This is intended to sustain tenancies and support health and well-being.
- An increase in the loans provided by the scheme, from £30 (single people) and £60 (families) to £50 (single people) and £100 (families)
- An extension of the fuel poverty offer/scheme, in that the Council now offers support towards immediate fuel poverty in the form of grants up to £49 as the core offer.
- Provision of support for travel expenses for people who have been unemployed for a period of more than six months or more and whose new income details are at or below the Manchester Living Wage. The support is in the form of a grant/purchase of a bus pass to cover travel expenses to and from work for the first four weeks employment. Where possible the Council looks to provide the pass rather than any cash award.
- The Council also offers to make an appointment and pay the membership fee to one of the two credit unions operating in the city.
- The scheme being extended to provide support to residents who are moving accommodation as a direct result of the welfare reform changes, for example moving to a smaller property. The support helps towards removal costs and/or the provision of essential white goods or furniture (as determined by the Council's core offer) if these goods were either not provided at the new property or could not be moved.

2.4 Food Poverty Grants

For 2014/15 the Council also agreed to release a further £500,000 from the Welfare Provision Scheme to provide specific support to vulnerable residents to deal with extreme circumstances of food poverty by allowing third sector and other stakeholder organisations to bid for a share of this money. This followed a successful scheme in 2013/14 as part of which the Council awarded £247,000 to 59 third sector agencies.

3. Performance to date during 2014/15

3.1 Funding

The Council's set up, programme and administrative funding was:

Funding / Year	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
Set Up Funding	£27,219		
Programme Funding		£2,721,885	£2,721,885
Administrative Funding		£575,155	£527,191
Total	£27,219	£3,297,040	£3,249,076

3.2 2014/15 spend and forecast

At the beginning of the year the Council forecasted an under spend. The plan for this money is to use it to deliver the scheme in future years, post March 2015 when specific funding ends.

Excluding the core Welfare Provision Scheme offer as described in sections 1 and 2, the Council has set aside £1.4 million of the £2.72 million to support other key projects and vulnerable groups as follows:

- £800,000 for households with children that have no recourse to public funds.
- £500,000 to external organisations to fund emergency food provision.
- £100,000 as contingency to support any overspends in Discretionary Housing Payments as a result of the welfare benefit changes affecting housing benefit for vulnerable households

Recently the changes in regulations and a shift in composition of cases affecting no recourse to public funds families has increased the financial pressure within the local authority to support these families.

Changes affecting the NRPF population:

- Legislation has reduced the opportunity to work informally
- Time taken for the Home Office to consider applications from "overstayers" is taking up to 12 months to be considered
- The Home Office are not removing families when they have no application to remain in the UK resulting in caseloads remaining open for several years
- An increase in the number of people experiencing domestic violence and consequently presenting for support

The effect of the above has seen an increase in the average number of families supported per year increase from 90 in 2010-2011 to 143 in 2013-2014 and the average number of open cases rise from 77 to 129 in the same period. This projected spend for 2014/15 is £2.268m an overspend of £800k on the budget.

3.3 2014/15 awards

The tables below show the applications and awards for the first half of the financial year to date (April to September 2014). Please note that each of the 2,858 applications received since April 2014 could contain multiple Request Types.

Request Type	Number of Requests	Approved Requests	Refused Requests	Approval Percentage
Loan	1,643	437	1,206	27%
Furniture	629	416	213	66%
White Goods	1,014	575	439	57%
Beds and Bedding	1,554	962	592	62%
Travel	45	9	36	20%
Fuel	838	440	398	53%
Total	5,723	2,839	2,884	

Reason for application approval	Number Approved	Value of Awards
Moving Home/Resettlement	616	£329,647
Disaster	150	£10,757
Other Reason	494	£37,027
Travel	8	£765
Providing Care for Others	34	£2,113
Total	1,302	£380,309

Of the 1,556 applications that were refused by the Council almost 1,206 were requests for loans. 78% of these (1,220 of the 1,556) were referred on to the DWP for a JSA/ESA Hardship Payment (due to a benefits sanction), a Budgeting Loan (on benefits with non crisis support, for example to replace broken white goods) or a Short Term Benefit Advance (because a benefit claim is pending). A further 66 of the refused applications were from people that did not live in the city.

Attached at appendix three are some real examples of residents in the city that have been provided with support from the scheme.

We continue to provide loans to residents and as part of the offer any resident accessing support is made a member of the credit union. The following table shows details of loans that have been issued and the repayment rates.

Credit Union	Loan Requests	Loans Issued	Amount Issued	Loans currently in Repayment	Fully paid Loans	Amounts Repaid
Manchester	364	354	£20,170	53	29	£2,734
South M/c	51	51	£2,660	11	2	£122
Total	415	405	£22,830	64	31	£2,856

3.4 Processing Times

89.2% of applications are assessed and completed with a decision communicated to the applicant within one working day.

99% of applications are processed in seven working days.

The longest processing time has been 11 days (three cases). This was the result of needing additional information from the applicant or their support worker.

3.5 Progress on the food poverty scheme

An invitation to apply for a food poverty grant for the period 2014 to 2016 was issued to voluntary, community and faith sector organisations on 1 September 2014. A fund of £400,000 is available. The key requirements are that:

- The organisation is based in Manchester and / or mainly working with Manchester residents
- Bids invited for between £5,000 and £50,000
- Funding should be spent by 31 March 2016

A total of 58 applications have been received and decisions will be confirmed to all applicants by 28 November 2014.

An additional £100,000 is intended to be used to support increased membership of Fareshare (an organisation that accesses and distributes surplus food stocks) amongst the Voluntary Community Sector; developing additional food sources; and facilitating a food poverty VCS network. Further activity is required in these areas. Alternatively the decision making panel may determine that this money should be added to the bigger pot and used to support a higher number of grant applications.

3.6 Feedback, complaints and member enquiries

The scheme has received five MP enquiries, three member enquiries, three user complaints and five positive feedback responses during the first half of 2014/15. The Team were able to amend the decision on a number of these cases and make an appropriate award as a result of the additional information presented.

Two of the positive feedback responses made particular mention of the speed of responses received and two noted how helpful and caring the staff were.

One applicant wrote:

'I want to say, "Thank you, for the recent support..." I now have essentials in my flat needed to be able live comfortably. It has had a big impact on my life and mental health and I cannot say, "Thank you enough...!" '

3.7 2014/15 Government grants

On 27 January 2014, all councils were sent a ministerial communication via the DWP

confirming 2014/15 allocation. The letter also confirmed that this was the final year that the Council would receive a discrete grant allocation for this provision and also suggested that if not being spent by individual local authorities they may determine to withdraw awards.

To date the Council has received £2,436,807 (up to and including the 3rd quarter payment) and there has been no indication that the grant for the remainder of the year will be reduced or withheld.

4 2015/16 Scheme

4.1 Funding position

At 30 September £1,780,309 of the £2.7m 2014/15 budget has been spent or committed. This is made up of:

- £380,309 in Welfare Provision
- £800,000 for households with children that have no recourse to public funds.
- £500,000 to external organisations to fund emergency food provision.
- £100,000 as contingency to support any overspends in Discretionary Housing Payments as a result of the welfare benefit changes affecting housing benefit for vulnerable households

Current projections indicate that a total of £840,500 will be paid out in direct response to Welfare Provision Scheme applications during 2014/15 suggesting a total spend in the year of £2,240,500.

4.2 Judicial Review

Government plans to end the Local Welfare Provision Fund have been challenged in the High Court as a result of a judicial review and an intervention by Islington Council and the Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG). This prompted the Government to reconsider funding for the scheme and to:

- Complete the ongoing review of local welfare provision,
- Conduct an “appropriate” consultation,
- Consider the impact on equality and discrimination, and
- Make a new decision on funding for local welfare provision for 2015/16.

This process must be completed by the time of the provisional local government finance settlement in December 2014.

The Council is engaging in the consultation process, with a reply to the Government required by 21 November 2014. However, it must be noted that the consultation is about how the funds in the RSG Settlement should be distributed rather than indicating that any additional funds will be made available.

5. Conclusions

5.1 The Council's Welfare Provision Scheme provides critical and timely support and assistance to some of Manchester's most vulnerable residents.

The scheme has been adjusted this year to offer additional support to people who are setting up a new home, especially following a period in supported housing, with a focus on freeing up expensive and limited supported units and improving the chances of users feeling at home and settling into their communities.

Fuel payments have proven valuable and important in addressing residents in fuel poverty.

When the Government announces its decision in December on Local Welfare Provision funding for 2015/16 a decision will be needed about the level at which Manchester can maintain a scheme given the resources received since 2013/14.

Appendix One - Examples of Support

Examples of support that has been provided includes (real examples, names have been changed):

- Martin (35 yrs old) is being treated for bowel cancer. He needed items as he cannot leave the flat most of the time due to the chemotherapy side effects. He also suffers from depression which is due to the cancer. Martin has to eat a specific diet and has been given a fridge to store fresh food in, a cooker to make meals, a kitchen starter pack and general cleaning materials.
- Rachel was leaving fully furnished supported accommodation for her own unfurnished tenancy (Eastlands Homes). She was receiving ESA (Support Group with the Enhanced disability Premium) and also DLA Care (High) and Mobility (Low). Her support worker advised that Rachel was moving because she was leaving a resettlement scheme because the scheme was closing. Her new property was unfurnished. Rachel needed a washing machine because she could not cope with going to a launderette and because of a back disability and a degenerative disease she could not do her washing herself at home by hand. All goods requested were approved (sofa, cooker, fridge, washing machine, kitchen starter pack).
- Ian applied because he had "Lost all my furniture following mental health relapse, which resulted in an admission under the mental health act." Ian had lived at his address for over 10 years. His support worker advised that Ian had a serious mental breakdown and sold all his furniture to buy a ticket to go to the Congo. However, he was sectioned in hospital so could not go. Ian is better now and living back at home. A sofa, cooker, fridge freezer, kitchen starter pack and a bed and bedding package were approved.
- Sharon had been staying in supported accommodation due to financial abuse and safeguarding issues. She was supported in her move to a new tenancy in a planned resettlement move to independent living. Sharon benefited from the WPS by gaining stability in her new tenancy, and regaining her self esteem and confidence after her experience in her previous tenancy. She was awarded an electric cooker, a fridge freezer, bedding pack and a kitchen starter pack.
- Clare, a working single mother with two young children had been homeless for 12 months before being re-housed. Clare was awarded 3 x single beds, 3 x bedding packs, cooker, fridge freezer, kitchen starter pack and a £100 loan. She was delighted to be awarded the furniture, which she felt would improve her family's life for the better.

Appendix Two

Additional data on who has received support from the Welfare Provision Scheme
(based on awards from 1/4/14 to 30/9/14)

Age/Gender Statistics				
Age Range	Female	Male	Total	% of Total
25-34	492	433	925	32%
16-24	454	248	702	25%
35-44	305	309	614	21%
45-54	189	238	427	15%
55-64	61	92	153	5%
65-74	10	15	25	1%
75-84	3	3	6	0%
0-15	1	4	5	0%
85+	1	0	1	0%
Total	1,516	1,342	2,858	

Family Make-up Statistics				
Number of Children	Female	Male	Total	% of Total
0	574	1,157	1,731	61%
1	455	80	535	19%
2	282	57	339	12%
3	109	30	139	5%
4	57	11	68	2%
5	29	6	35	1%
6	7	0	7	0%
7	2	1	3	0%
8	0	0	0	0%
9	1	0	1	0%
Total	1,516	1,342	2,858	

Awards by Ward

Ward	Approved Applications
Harpurhey	£31,920
Miles Platting and Newton Heath	£30,428
Gorton North	£27,091
Sharston	£23,742
Northenden	£22,056
Ardwick	£20,980
Charlestown	£17,905
Higher Blackley	£16,277
Woodhouse Park	£13,866
Bradford	£13,683
City Centre	£12,615
Ancoats and Clayton	£11,786
Brooklands	£11,710
Moss Side	£11,295
Cheetham	£11,251
Hulme	£10,973
Gorton South	£10,526
Whalley Range	£8,445
Fallowfield	£7,931
Moston	£7,880
Crumpsall	£7,816
Rusholme	£7,523
Baguley	£7,284
Old Moat	£6,550
Chorlton Park	£6,083
Levenshulme	£5,900
Longsight	£4,946
Chorlton	£4,457
Burnage	£3,548
Withington	£1,955
Didsbury East	£1,015
Didsbury West	£870
Outside Manchester	£0
Total	£380,310

- The Council received 66 applications for support from people who were not living in the city.

Appendix Three- Welfare Provision Policy Document 2014/15

Manchester City Council

Welfare Provision Scheme

Policy Document effective

From 1 April 2014

Directorate: Revenues and Benefits Unit
Date: April 2014
Version: 1

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 from 1 April 2014

The Council will use this grant to provide a new scheme to provide financial support in the form of loans and 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 specific vulnerable group and are in extreme fuel poverty in that they are unable to afford immediate heating costs during the winter months or have been disconnected.

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

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;
- 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;
- 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 a number of 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. When the budget is exhausted no further payments will be made;
- 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 may however request a reconsideration of their case. This process is listed in this policy; and;
- Each applicant will be restricted to a limited number of awards (including both grants and loans) within a set time period, commencing from the date their last application was received.

4. Awards and Assistance provided by the Scheme

The Welfare Provision Scheme normally supports residents with six 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; 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.
- (d) Residents that are in a specific vulnerable group and are in extreme fuel poverty in that they are unable to afford immediate heating costs during the winter months 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 or loan 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 benefits to salary.
- (f) Residents who are moving in direct response to welfare reform changes, for example moving to a smaller property to avoid the spare bedroom subsidy. In these cases the Council may provide a grant towards removal costs and where necessary the provision of essential white goods or furniture (as determined by the Council's core scheme) where they are either not provided

in the new property or cannot be moved.

The Welfare Provision Scheme offers support to residents accessing the scheme in the form of:

(i). Grants:

- 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, fridge/freezer, three seat sofa and kitchen starter pack. In some cases (where health or family circumstances require) the Council will consider the additional provision of a washing machine.
(A maximum of 1 award per tenancy over a rolling 3 year period); or
- Support to stay within their home – provision of essential furniture or equipment items;
(A maximum of 1 award per tenancy over a rolling 3 year period); or
- Immediate response to severe fuel poverty - a cash grant of up to £49 that is used to top up the resident's fuel card or utility account.
(A maximum of one award per individual over a rolling 12-month period although decisions will be based on individual circumstances and presenting need); or
- Travel expenses - the purchase of a bus/travel pass for the first four weeks of employment.
- Moving due to welfare reform impacts – a contribution towards removal expenses and the provision of essential furniture and white goods.

(ii). Loans:

- Short term, low interest, repayable loans (between £50 and £100) - following a crisis or emergency (paid via the credit union).
(A maximum of 3 awards per individual over a rolling 12-month period although decisions on further loan awards will be based on engagement and repayment of loans).

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, which is a reputable recognisable high street brand;
- 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 confirm 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 between £30 and £49 to support residents with an emergency fuel purchase or to avoid disconnection to residents. This would normally be 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 cost of public transport, to and from the resident's home address for the first four weeks of employment. Where possible the Council would look to provide the pass rather than any cash award.

The Council will also offer to make an appointment and pay the membership fee to one of the two credit unions operating in the city.

Loans

Loans of between £50 and £100 will be provided by the Council, but administered by a credit union, specifically:

- Manchester Credit Union www.manchestercreditunion.co.uk or:
- South Manchester Credit Union www.smcreditunion.co.uk

The use of the credit union will be dependent upon the nearest collection point.

All loans provided by the Scheme will:

- Be paid either directly into a bank account, or on a Credit Union pre-payment card;
- Be repayable at a standard rate of £3 per week;
- Be subject to an interest rate of 2% per month (equal to 26.8% APR);
- Be available for collection from a local Credit Union Branch, agreed on confirmation of award;
- Include annual membership of the credit union, and therefore access to the wider services and benefits of being a member.

Residents who do not repay loans will be excluded from receiving further loan awards from the Welfare Provision Scheme.

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).

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 of the following criteria:

No.	Criteria	As Defined By:
1.1	Lives within the Manchester area	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.
	Is in receipt of (or have claimed and are likely to get) either: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Income Support; • Jobseeker's Allowance; • Employment Support Allowance; or • Guaranteed Pension Credit. 	Resident has claimed and likely to be entitled to* or is in receipt of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Income Support, • Jobseeker's Allowance, • Employment Support Allowance; or • Guaranteed Pension Credit *This is for people who may be

		moving due to domestic violence or as part of a witness protection scheme.
1.2	Have no savings or capital.	Including savings in cash, money in banks, saving schemes, premium bonds, stocks, shares and investments in property or land.
1.3	Aged 16 or over	Is aged 16 or over at the time of application.

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

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;	The Council would normally only consider residents in receipt of medium rate Disability Living Allowance for either care or mobility or Attendance Allowance
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 a specific vulnerable group and are in extreme fuel poverty in that they are unable to afford immediate heating costs during the winter months or if they have been disconnected.	Within the household there are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children under 5; or • A member of the family with a disability or serious health needs; or • Over pension age ; or • Other vulnerability issues for which each case would be considered on own merits.
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	Resident employed after a period of at least 6 months unemployment. New salary/wages at or below

	get to work.	living wage (as determined by the Council)
2.6	To provide residents who are moving due to welfare reform changes with help towards removal costs or essential furniture	Evidence that move is in response to welfare reform changes.

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 By:
3.1	A resident does not meet any of the schemes exclusions	See section 6.4.
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 be excluded from receiving support where they:

- (i) have exceeded the agreed maximum number of funding awards over a given timescale (see section 5.1);
- (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 17 and 21 funding arrangements with Families, Health and Wellbeing 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 result of a major disaster or civil contingency issue 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

To ensure maximum accessibility for the online application, support can be provided in four ways:

- (i) Self service – by the person or household requiring support;
- (ii) Supported by a family member or friend;
- (iii) Supported self service by a third party organisation, such as a Registered Provider, Advice Agency, Probation Service or charity organisation;
- (iv) Supported self service 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, Council Tax Support and free school meals) 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 1998.

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;

- Whether the applicant has contributed towards the crisis or emergency.

8.1 Timescales

The Council will endeavour to deal with all applications promptly. The aim is to deal with applications within the following timescales:

- For loans following a crisis or emergency - within five days of receiving all information needed to determine the application.
- For travel grants - within five days of receiving all information needed to determine the application.
- For furniture/white goods grants - within ten days of receiving all information needed to determine the application.
- For fuel grants - within two working days of receiving all information needed to determine the application.

The Welfare Provision Scheme operates during the usual 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 out of these hours.

8.2 Notification

Once a decision has been made on whether an application has been successful or not, the claimant is advised in writing with the reasons for this decision. They will also be told by telephone or by email of the decision if these 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 is 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 normally be received within 28 days of the original application decision date.

When a reconsideration request is received the Council will conduct a reconsideration of the decision. All reconsiderations are considered by an officer not involved in the original decision and a decision will be made within 10 days of when the request was received.

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 the fight against 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 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 sanctions against future claims or if appropriate criminal proceedings.

11. Policy Review

In addition to an annual review, the policy will be reviewed in the light of any budget changes, legislative changes; trends or other factors that impact on the effectiveness of the policy.