

Derbyshire Discretionary Fund Fact sheet

Information for Professionals

The Government policies of Welfare Reform include establishing 'local welfare provision' to be led by upper tier authorities from April 2013. Derbyshire County Council has established the Derbyshire Discretionary Fund to meet this challenge.

From April 2013 the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) has not been providing Community Care Grants and Crisis Loans and instead signposts applicants to local provision. Some residual Crisis Loan function is being retained by JobCentre Plus in the provision of 'Short Term Advances' and DWP Budgeting Loans are also still available.

A review of the first year of operation of the scheme has resulted in some amendments to the criteria, and this information sheet therefore reflects the revised criteria with effect from 1.7.2014.

Principles

The Derbyshire Discretionary Fund has been set up with the following overarching principles:

- Working to effectively signpost to preventative and wider provision to better assist applicant, and avoid repeated use;
- Understanding the landscape of relevant complementary and alternative provision;
- Not taking over the role of other agencies/departments (e.g. DWP);
- Focusing on those facing greatest difficulty, and enabling a more flexible response to unavoidable need;
- Assessing according to the nature, extent and urgency of the need - taking into account the risks to health and safety of those involved;
- Payments are discretionary, and the budgetary position of the Fund will always be borne in mind when deciding on applications.

Scope of the DDF

The Derbyshire Discretionary Fund (DDF) provides two forms of grant payment – Exceptional Pressure Grants and Emergency Cash Payments – which mirror, in broad terms, the provision previously delivered by Community Care Grants and Crisis Loans from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP).

The scope of the *Emergency Cash Payments* is to assist individuals or households when there is insufficient resource to meet an urgent need for food, heating or travel expenses, that poses an immediate and substantial risk to the health and safety of the person(s).

Awards of Emergency Cash Payments will be subject to a maximum limit, which is set at 75% of the single person rate of means tested benefit for claimants over 25 and under pension age. From 1.7.2014 this is £54 with an additional maximum amount for each family member of £10. There are no minimum limits.

The scope of the *Exceptional Pressure Grants* is:

- helping people to establish themselves in the community following a stay in institutional or residential accommodation, where care was provided.
- helping people to remain in the community rather than enter institutional or residential accommodation
- easing exceptional pressure on the applicant and their family
- helping people setting up home as part of a resettlement programme following a period during which they have been without a settled way of life.
- travel expenses in certain circumstances
e.g. to visit someone who is ill; attend a relative's funeral; ease a domestic crisis; or visit a child who is with the other parent pending a court decision.

There are some general rules about the DDF and who can apply:

Age: Applicants must be aged over 16

Resident: Applicants must have been resident in Derbyshire for at least the past three months with some exceptions e.g. for those released from prison or young offenders institution, or leaving care or hospital setting, or who are fleeing domestic violence.

Capital: Applicants for Exceptional Pressure Grants will be expected to use their available capital in excess of £1000 (per family) before a payment from the DDF will be made.

Repeat applications: Emergency Cash Payments will be limited to 3 in any twelve month period (rolling year) unless new circumstances arise as a consequence of a disaster.

Exceptional Pressure Grants will not be considered for the same item within a twelve month period of a previous application for the same item, whether successful or not, unless new circumstances have arisen.

Relevant Benefits: For the purpose of Exceptional Pressure Grants, applicants must be in receipt of:

- Income Support; Income Based Jobseekers Allowance; Income Related Employment & Support Allowance; or Guarantee or Savings Pension Credit; or
- Contributory Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA), or Contributory Employment and Support Allowance (ESA), where the household income is at the same level as that for income based JSA or ESA; or
- be likely to qualify for such when establishing themselves in the community in the circumstances giving rise to the application; or

- have been on such a benefit within the last three months before making the application and the reason they are no longer on the benefit is that they have started in employment.

Applications and Decision Making

The application line for the Derbyshire Discretionary Fund is 01629 533399. This is available Monday – Friday between 10am and 4pm. Application information will be gathered during the initial telephone call, and further information for assessment will be requested when a member of the DDF team telephones the applicant back. The DDF receives over 300 applications a week. The telephone line is often very busy, so there may be delays in getting through but callers can leave a message and will receive a call back.

A third party (eg agency or carer) can make an application on a person's behalf, and the DDF team will seek information to ensure that they have the applicant's permission to do so.

Whenever possible an Exceptional Pressure Grant application will be triaged within 3 working days and contact made with the applicant.

Wherever possible an Emergency Cash Payment decision will be made within 1-3 working days.

How payments will be made to applicants

The DDF has three methods to pay applicants.

For Exceptional Pressure Grants:

- A preloaded card. The card is issued via the Family Fund Trust and accompanying documentation will set out the items awarded and details of where the applicant can redeem the card.
- Direct bank transfer. Payment direct to landlord or service provider where appropriate.

For Emergency Cash Payments:

- A voucher to be cashed at a Post Office. A barcode/voucher is given to the applicant to take into the Post Office to collect their award.

Reviews

Applicants who have been refused, in full or in part, for either an Emergency Cash Payment or an Exceptional Pressure Grant, can request that their decision be looked at again via the DDF application line. This request should be made within three working days for an Emergency Cash Payment request and one calendar month (allowing two additional days in February) for an Exceptional Pressure Grant request. Late applications for review will be considered where there are exceptional circumstances. A review request will be allocated to a member of the team, who did not make the original decision, and reviewed by a more senior member of staff as required.

This factsheet will be updated as new information becomes available.

If you would like your organisation to be on the circulation list to receive an alert when the information sheet is updated please send your email details to DDF@derbyshire.gov.uk marking the subject of the email as "Information Factsheet request".