

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 2000

REGISTER OF URGENT
DECISIONS TAKEN BY THE
CHIEF EXECUTIVE

NORTH DEVON COUNCIL CONSTITUTION
– Part 3 Annexe 2: Officer Delegations –
Chief Executive



Reference No:

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- 1) SUBJECT: North Devon Household Support Fund

 - 2) REQUESTED DECISION: To approve the local policy as shown attached and to allow the Head of Customer Focus to make any future amendments to the policy following consultation with the Director of Resources and Leader.

 - 3) STATEMENT OF THE REASONS FOR THE REQUEST AND WHY IT IS URGENT:
The scheme has been set up by DCC from new government funding and is due to be introduced on the 15th November. There has been no opportunity to take the matter to a committee for approval.

 - 4) FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS: (NOTE: Please state if there are any financial implications. If so, state whether there are sufficient funds within the agreed budget. If there are insufficient funds please state how the decision will be financed).
There are none, NDC will be administering funds allocated to it under the scheme.

 - 5) ANY ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED:
There were no other alternatives really other than not being involved in the scheme.

 - 6) A RECORD OF ANY CONFLICT OF INTEREST DECLARED:
None

 - 7) A NOTE OF ANY DISPENSATION IF GRANTED:
None

 - 8) LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS (but not including published works or those which disclose exempt or confidential information (as defined in paragraph 10.4 and 10.5 of the Access to Information Procedural Rules Part 4 of the Constitution):

Policy attached

10) CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN:

The following have been consulted on this urgent decision:

Consultee	Consulted Yes/No	Date
Leader of Council (<i>or Deputy Leader</i>)	Y	7/11/21
Chair of Committee (with the Authority to take the decision) (<i>or Vice-Chair</i>)		
Lead Member		
Ward Member(s)		
Head of Service (name)	Y	7/11/21
Finance	y	7/11/21
Legal		

11) OFFICER REQUESTING URGENT DECISION TO BE TAKEN BY THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE:

Head of Customer Focus

12) APPROVED BY CHIEF EXECUTIVE: YES



13) DATE OF DECISION:

9th November 2021

14) CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S COMMENTS:

Approved for the reasons set out. There is insufficient time to take this matter to a committee but not being involved in the scheme would go against the principles that have grown up through Team Devon and would disadvantage residents of ND.

15) DATE TO BE PRESENTED TO STRATEGY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE:

GUIDANCE NOTES

NOTE:

PROCEDURE FOR URGENT DECISIONS:

1. Completed form to be passed to the Chief Executive following consultation with the interested parties.
2. If a decision is specific to a Ward, efforts should be made to ascertain the views of the local Councillor (s).
3. The Chief Executive will make his decision.

PROCEDURE FOR URGENT DECISION MAKING AS PER THE CONSTITUTION

Officer Delegations: the Chief Executive:

Urgent Decision Making

- 3.48 To take a decision on any matter falling within the remit of any Committee in cases of urgency where it is not reasonably practicable to obtain prior approval of a Committee SUBJECT TO:
- 3.48.1 the prior consultation, where practicable, with the Leader or Deputy Leader and the Chair or Vice Chair of the relevant Committee, and
 - 3.48.2 the proviso that this power will not extend to the determination of any application submitted pursuant to the Planning Acts or under the Licensing Act 2003 or the Gambling Act 2005, and
 - 3.48.3 the decision being reported to the next meeting of the relevant Committee and the next meeting of Strategy and Resources Committee.

North Devon Council Household Support Fund Policy

The purpose of this document is to set out the objectives of the scheme and to outline the methods and working practices to meet these.

The Household Support Fund is intended to help individuals and families with rapid short-term financial support to address economic vulnerability and financial hardship until the end of March 2022. It is designed to ensure that people who are most in need can access emergency short-term support with regard to food, energy, water bills and wider essential costs.

Scheme Eligibility

The Household Support Fund is intended to help residents who have limited income and do not have ready access to other funds.

Applicants must meet the following criteria:

1. Be over the age of 16; and
2. Live in North Devon Council district (as your main residence); and
3. Be without sufficient resources to meet the immediate short-term needs of themselves or dependents.

Types of assistance that can be provided

The NDC Household Support Fund can provide assistance for the following items:

- **Food** – via food/High Street vouchers
- **Energy and water bills**- support with energy bills for any form of fuel that is used for the purpose of domestic heating, cooking or lighting, including oil or portable gas cylinders. It can also be used to support with water bills including for drinking, washing, cooking, and sanitary purposes and sewerage.
- **Essentials linked to energy and water** - including sanitary products, warm clothing, soap, blankets, boiler service/repair, purchase of equipment including fridges, freezers, ovens, etc.
- **Wider essentials** – support with essential household items which may include, but are not limited to, support with other essential monthly expenditure which cannot be deferred including broadband or phone bills, clothing, and essential transport-related costs such as repairing a car, buying a bicycle or paying for fuel.
- **Housing Costs** - in exceptional cases of genuine emergency where existing housing support schemes do not meet this exceptional need, the Fund can be used to support housing costs with caveats (see **Appendix A**)

The type and level of assistance will take account of the circumstances of the household and each application will be assessed on its own merits.

- Payments will be made via vouchers, into bank accounts via BACS or direct purchasing of items.

- There is no maximum award, however any awards over £500 will be by exception and will be agreed by the Head of Service. It is anticipated the majority of awards will be much lower than this.

Consideration of the budgetary provision

- Funding for the North Devon Household Support Fund, £128k is provided by Devon County Council (DCC) as part of their allocation of the national Household fund
- The budget will be monitored weekly and the standard Management Information (MI) reporting template, provided by the Department for Works and Pension to record the amount provided or paid to vulnerable households under the remit of this grant, will be completed.
- Extensions to this funding allocation will be considered by DCC, however if funds are exhausted before 31 March 2022 then the fund will be closed.

Repeat Applications

Support will usually be provided from the fund once, however repeat applications will be considered dependent on circumstances and assessed on its own merits.

Fraudulent applications

- The officer assessing the application will need to pose questions or seek evidence to establish the facts before making a decision.
- Failure by the applicant to disclose a material fact or to make a false application will be treated as a fraudulent application.
- Where fraud has been detected the applicant will be refused any further assistance and where appropriate, the Council may prosecute the applicant.

Data

- Any request for supporting evidence will be reasonable and proportionate according to the merits of the case.
- North Devon Council will only collect data relevant to an individual's Household Support Fund application.
- Data will be held in Firmstep (our Customer Relationship Management software) with all appropriate security measures in place
- Data will be used to
 - Determine eligibility for the Household Support Fund
 - Make contact about decisions or updates related to an application
 - Issue the Household Support Fund payment to a nominated Bank or Building Society account where appropriate
- Data may be shared with both internal and external organisations for the purposes of validating any applications. Information will be cross matched with other data held by the Council and third-party agencies e.g. Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), HM Revenue & Customs (HMRC) for verification purposes.

- Data may be shared within the organisation to support efforts to redirect an applicant to other support that may be available.
- Data may also be shared within the organisation or with other Government agencies in order to prevent and/or detect potentially fraudulent activity. Subject to a legal gateway, information may also be shared for the prevention of fraud and criminal activity with other organisations such as
 - The police
 - Immigration Service, Absconder Services and/or UK Border Agency
 - Health and social care organisations
 - Other Local Authorities
- Personal data will not be kept longer than necessary

Award Process

Applications can be made online or by telephone by the customer or 3rd party such as 365 Energy, Citizens Advice Bureau, Encompass etc.

The application will be subject to a verification process where the assessor may request further information to enable an accurate assessment.

The assessor will consider all relevant information and take into account amongst other things:

- The applicant's financial circumstances and those of their household members
- The applicant's access to other forms of financial support
- The circumstances and reasons for the application
- Preventative measures taken by the applicant and their household members
- The potential impact of making or not making the award
- The budgetary situation of the fund

This will then be passed to a Manager for a final decision and arrangement of payment.

A declaration will be made by the Applicant which will allow the Council to share information with third parties to help prevent fraud. Records will be kept on each application received for the duration of the scheme.

Applications will be assessed as soon as practicable and usually within 3 working days.

Appendix A

In exceptional cases of genuine emergency where existing housing support schemes do not meet this exceptional need, the Fund can be used to support housing costs with the following caveats:

- Where eligible, ongoing housing support for rent must be provided through the housing cost element of Universal Credit (UC) and Housing Benefit (HB) rather than the Household Support Fund.
- Eligibility for Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs) must first be considered before emergency housing support is offered through the Household Support Fund. The Authority must also first consider whether the claimant is at statutory risk of homelessness and therefore owed a duty of support through the Homelessness Prevention Grant (HPG).
- In exceptional cases of genuine emergency, households in receipt of HB, UC, or DHPs can still receive housing cost support through the Household Support Fund if it is deemed necessary by their Authority. However, the Fund should not be used to provide housing support on an ongoing basis or to support unsustainable tenancies.
- Individuals in receipt of some other form of housing support could still qualify for the other elements of the Household Support Fund, such as food, energy, water, essentials linked to energy and water and wider essentials.