



**Worcester City
Discretionary Welfare Assistance Scheme
Guidance Document**

December 2023

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1. Purpose of the Guidance Document

- 1.1 Since 2017 Worcester City Council has committed its own budget to operate a welfare assistance scheme to assist Worcester residents with crisis and re-settlement support.
- 1.2 Since November 2020 additional government funding (Household Support Funding) has been allocated to the scheme to assist a larger number of households and to provide additional types of support. This was to alleviate the financial impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and the subsequent cost-of-living crisis and temporary amendments were made to the scheme to make best use of this additional funding.
- 1.3 A review of the scheme was undertaken in 2023 to evaluate the impact and value of these changes and to determine how the scheme would operate in the future. The review involved consultation with stakeholders and referrers, analysis of demand and applicant profile, and a review of other similar schemes operating across the country.
- 1.4 As a result of the review and in order to continue to meet the needs of an increasing number of applicants, it has been necessary to make some changes to the scheme. This guidance document replaces previous versions and sets out the eligibility criteria, support available and the application process.
- 1.5 The eligibility criteria and goods and services available under the scheme set out in this document are subject to change, depending on the availability of Household Support Funding from 2024/25 onwards. Any changes to the scheme will be published on the Council's website and communicated to referring agencies.

2. Aims of the Discretionary Welfare Assistance Scheme (DWAS)

- 2.1 The aims of the Worcester City DWAS are to:
 - Support vulnerable households who are experiencing financial hardship with essential living costs
 - Assist vulnerable, low income households who are re-settling after a period of homelessness or other unsettled accommodation with essential household items
 - Sustain tenancies and prevent homelessness
 - Safeguard residents in their own homes and support independent living arrangements
 - Provide relief from immediate crisis

- Enable provision of effective advice and signposting for appropriate support, e.g. mental health, substance abuse, debt management etc.

2.2 The fund is discretionary and limited by budget available and there is no entitlement to an award. Not all eligible applicants will be successful, for example in the event that there is no further funding available for the financial year.

2.3 The scheme aims to assist vulnerable people where exceptional circumstances have left them unable to meet their immediate short-term needs, where they require help to maintain their independence within the community or where assistance is required with re-settlement into the community. The scheme cannot provide long-term support to households and cannot replace more appropriate support available elsewhere.

2.4 The scheme aims to facilitate access to appropriate support by requiring all applications to be submitted by a referral agency who can undertake a holistic assessment of the household's circumstances and provide or signpost them to additional support where needed. In particular, referral agencies should ensure that appropriate advice regarding income maximisation, debt management and budgeting is provided to avoid repeated reliance on crisis support schemes such as this.

2.5 The scheme seeks to treat all applicants fairly and equitably, with full consideration given to their circumstances. Consideration will be given to the nature, extent and urgency of the need in every case where an application for assistance is made.

2.6 The scheme will seek to signpost to alternative sources of support or assistance where possible in order to protect the remaining funds for residents in the greatest need.

3. Administration of the scheme

3.1 The Worcester City DWAS is administered by the Council's Strategic Housing Service, working with the following partners:

- **Worcester Municipal Charities**

- This charitable organisation administers the white goods element of the scheme, processing orders and arranging delivery of items with the supplier and customers.
- The charity provides this service at no cost to the Council.

- **Paypoint**

- Provision of energy and Love to Shop vouchers for essential food, energy and household items.
- Use of the software is subject to annual licence and management fees, as well as transaction fees for vouchers issued.

- **Charity Shop Gift Card**

- The Council are pleased to partner with this new Social Enterprise for the first time in 2023. The organisation works with national and local charities, offering gift cards which can be used in any participating charity shop.
- Gift cards will be issued through the scheme to meet the needs of applicants for Essential Items. The Charity Shop Gift Card organisation has worked with charities who have a local retail presence to introduce the scheme to their organisations, ensuring that there will be sufficient coverage in Worcester to support the delivery of the scheme.
- Partnering with the Charity Shop Gift Card will enable the Council to assist a larger number of households, support charitable organisations in the city, and contribute to achieving its sustainable objectives by supporting re-use of good quality second-hand items.
- This service is provided at no cost to the Council.

2.7 Monitoring and oversight of the scheme is the responsibility of Worcester City Council's Health & Wellbeing Committee.

4. Eligibility for the scheme

4.1 In order to ensure that the scheme is able to assist as many vulnerable households as possible, it is necessary to target assistance at the most vulnerable residents or those facing the most acute pressures.

4.2 All applicants to the scheme must meet the following eligibility criteria:

- Over 16
- Resident in Worcester City for at least 6 months or has a strong connection to Worcester City if they are homeless, or have moved to Worcester City after leaving custody or institutional care.
- Not subject to immigration control and would not fail a habitual residency test
- Experiencing financial hardship (a financial assessment form must be completed)

Priority Groups

- In one of the following priority groups:
 - Households which include dependent children under the age of 16 (or over the age of 16 and in full-time education) or a pregnant woman
 - Households which include a person with a disability or chronic illness
 - Households which include a person who is receiving support from secondary mental health services
 - Households who are homeless or at risk of homelessness
 - Households which include a person receiving care or support in the home from the local authority or health service
 - Households which include a person who is considered to be vulnerable due to having suffered violence or domestic abuse

Income/Financial Circumstances

- In receipt of, or entitled to one of the following income related benefits:
 - Housing Benefit
 - Income Support
 - Income based Job Seekers Allowance (JSA)
 - Income related Employment and Support Allowance (ESA)
 - Guaranteed Pension Credit
 - Working Tax Credit
 - Universal Credit
- No savings or other means of accessing financial support

Additional Eligibility Criteria

4.3 In addition to the scheme eligibility criteria, there are additional eligibility criteria for each element of the scheme; Crisis Support and Re-Settlement. These criteria are shown in the table below.

Additional Eligibility Criteria	
Crisis Support	Re-Settlement
<p>Crisis Support is intended to meet the 'unplanned' needs of a household experiencing crisis. Applicants must meet one or more of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experiencing exceptional financial difficulty, e.g. due to significant unexpected expenditure • Having experienced a disaster, emergency or significant life event, such as fire, flood, bereavement, • Experiencing homelessness, or the threat of homelessness • Fleeing violence or domestic abuse 	<p>Re-settlement Support is intended to meet the 'planned' need of a household coming out of unsettled or supported accommodation. E.g:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leaving hospital • Leaving Prison • Leaving institutional or residential care • Moving out of temporary accommodation • Moving out of refuge accommodation • Moving out of hostel or supported accommodation • Homeless households or rough sleepers moving into independent accommodation

Exclusions

4.4 Applications to DWAS should be made once all other options and sources of assistance have been explored and exhausted. An award will not be made to an eligible household where the support can be provided elsewhere.

4.5 For the avoidance of doubt, the DWAS cannot assist in the following circumstances:

- The applicant is able to get help privately, either from their own income, savings or resources, or where family or friends are able to assist them
- The applicant already owns the requested item but would prefer a new one or a different model
- Items lost due to burglary or disaster are covered by an insurance policy or are a landlord's responsibility
- The household has already received the maximum number of awards through DWAS. Applications from members of the same household will be treated as ineligible (households are members of the same family who live together)

- The need could be met through eligibility for any of the following schemes:
 - DWP Budgeting Advance (without causing further hardship)
 - DWP Budgeting Loan (without causing further hardship)
 - DWP Hardship Payment
 - DWP statutory social fund payments (for example, Winter Fuel Allowance, Sure Start Maternity grants, or Funeral Payments)
 - Requirements under Fair Access to Care services (FACS), for example, statutory duty to provide medical or disability equipment
 - Discretionary Housing Payment

5. Support available through the scheme

5.1 There are two categories of assistance available through this scheme; **Crisis Support** and **Re-Settlement Support**.

Crisis Support

5.2 The Crisis Support category of the Discretionary Welfare Assistance Scheme is available to meet the unplanned need of a household experiencing crisis, who requires support with the cost of essential living costs, such as food, energy or essential household items. DWAS is not able to assist in the case of minor mishaps or damage, failure of a household item, lost or spent money or inability to access savings or capital.

5.3 The table below sets out what assistance is available within the Crisis Support category of the scheme.

Crisis Support			
Type of Support	What is provided?	Value	How many awards?
Food Vouchers	A voucher which can be used in-store and online at a variety of retailers. OR A voucher for a local supermarket	Dependent on household size: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £20 for first adult in household • £10 per each additional household member • Up to £70 maximum 	3 awards in a rolling 12 month period

Crisis Support			
Type of Support	What is provided?	Value	How many awards?
Energy Vouchers	Paypoint voucher to support households with pre-payment energy meters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £40 for singles/couples • £49 for families 	3 awards in a rolling 12 month period
Essential Items	Assistance with the provision of items or financial support which are considered essential for the household in accordance with the aims of the scheme (see 2.1)	Varies dependent on nature of need	1 award for the lifetime of the scheme

Re-Settlement Support

- 5.4 Re-settlement Support is intended to assist households who are coming out of temporary or other unsettled accommodation to successfully re-settle in their home, where they do not already own the requested items and the accommodation is not furnished with them.
- 5.5 An award for Re-settlement Support will only be considered if the application forms part of a planned re-settlement programme which includes support to set up a new home. Applications can be made prior to the applicant re-settling into a new home, but please note that a delivery address is required at the time of application.
- 5.6 In order to ensure that applications are appropriate and consistent with the applicant's re-settlement programme, applications for Re-Settlement Support can only be made by the support agency responsible for re-settling the applicant household. For example, this may be Prison or Probation Services, Social Care or Health Professionals, Refuge Support Workers, Supported Accommodation Workers, Housing Associations Officers, Housing Support Workers or Local Authority Housing Officers. Applications from other agencies will not be accepted.
- 5.7 Support is provided in the form of White Goods or Essential Items and only items which are considered essential for successful re-settlement can be provided.

5.8 The table below sets out what assistance is available within the Re-settlement Support category of the scheme.

Re-Settlement Support				
Type of Support	What is provided?		Value	How many awards?
White Goods	Families	Single/Couples	N/A	1 award for the lifetime of the scheme
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Electric Cooker* • Fridge Freezer • Washing Machine 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Electric Cooker* • Fridge Freezer 		
	Applications should only be made for white goods which are considered to be essential and which the referral agency has verified there is a need for			
Essential Items*	Assistance with the provision of items or financial support which are considered essential for the household in accordance with the aims of the scheme		Varies dependent on nature of need	1 award for the lifetime of the scheme

** Where a standard cooker cannot be installed in a recipient's home, a table-top oven and hob will be provided as an alternative.*

5.9 The scheme is not able to assist with replacing broken or worn-out white goods. In these circumstances, the referrer should assist the applicant to seek alternative assistance such as repair of the item, a budgeting loan from the DWP, referrals to charitable schemes, signposting to suppliers of good quality second hand goods or signposting to appropriate savings schemes, e.g. credit unions.

5.10 In exceptional circumstances, discretion may be given to allow a further award to a household who has already received a White Goods or Essential Items award, or to replace broken white goods where failure to do so would result in the applicant having to enter residential care or be at risk of homelessness or extreme financial hardship. Such applications should be supported by a written statement explaining the reasons for the applicant's need arising and why it cannot be met in any other way. All applications will be considered on their own merits, and the nature of the household's individual circumstances, the impact of refusal on their well-being and the availability of other sources of assistance

will be taken into account. Any decision on discretionary applications is final and a refusal cannot be appealed.

Essential Items

5.11 Applications for Essential Items will be considered on a case-by-case basis according to the needs of the individual household and support considered essential for one household may not be considered essential for others.

5.12 The table below provides an indication of the type of items or financial support that may be provided through a Crisis Support Essential Items application.

Essential Items		
Items routinely considered	Items considered in exceptional circumstances*	Items scheme cannot assist with
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Essential furniture – e.g. bed, mattress, bedding, seating • Children’s bed/cot & bedding • Essential crockery, cookware & utensils • Essential clothing • Children’s clothing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School uniform • White goods – cooker, fridge-freezer or washing machine • Mobile phone • Television • Financial assistance to prevent or alleviate homelessness • Items or financial assistance to sustain independent living 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arrears • Debt • Non-essential furniture • Non pre-payment energy costs • Decoration costs • Payments of money direct to applicant

**See 5.11 for examples of exceptional circumstances*

Exceptional Circumstances

5.13 Applications for items or financial assistance available only in exceptional circumstances must be supported by additional information and evidence and will be considered on a case-by-case basis. The table below provides further guidance. Please note that the examples given are not exhaustive.

Essential Items – Exceptional Circumstances

Item	Exceptional Circumstances	Assistance Available
School Uniform	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unexpected circumstance requiring child to change school • Household has been affected by fire or flood and their school uniform is damaged or lost • Child is the subject of an education, health and care plan where the terms require a change of school during the academic year or a specific school with mandatory logo items • Child’s health condition warrants additional support • Unexpected circumstances leading to severe financial hardship • Applicant must have attempted to source assistance elsewhere, e.g. school, Facebook Marketplace, online second-hand retailers etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provision of voucher for a retailer or charity shop participating in the Charity Shop Gift Card scheme • Voucher value will cover the cost of basic items only; requests for specific items or brands cannot be accommodated • Payment to specialist uniform retailer where voucher cannot be provided • Logo items will only be provided where the school policy states they are mandatory and only one logo item of each item type can be provided • Specialist sports uniform or equipment will only be provided in exceptional cases •
White Goods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unexpected circumstance requiring household to move home and they are <u>unable</u> to take white goods with them • Household has been affected by fire or flood and their white goods have been destroyed or irreparably damaged as a result • Member of household’s health condition warrants additional support • Unexpected circumstances leading to severe financial hardship • Applicant must have attempted to source assistance elsewhere, e.g. charity shops, Facebook Marketplace, second-hand retailers etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Normally only one item of white goods can be provided • Standard items only are available – requests for specific items cannot be accommodated

Essential Items – Exceptional Circumstances		
Item	Exceptional Circumstances	Assistance Available
Mobile phone	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applicant is working with multiple agencies and a mobile phone is required to improve engagement / appointment attendance etc. • Applicant is experiencing social isolation • Household has been affected by fire or flood and their belongings have been destroyed or irreparably damaged as a result 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Voucher for a basic model only will be provided • Smart phone will only be provided in exceptional cases with supporting evidence of need • Where available, a second-hand or refurbished item may be provided
Television	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applicant is experiencing social isolation • Household has been affected by fire or flood and their belongings have been destroyed or irreparably damaged as a result • Provision of item will contribute to sustaining independent living 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Voucher for a basic model only will be provided • Where available, a second-hand or refurbished item may be provided
Financial assistance to prevent or alleviate homelessness or to sustain independent living	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applicant is at high risk of losing their home, resulting in potential for rough sleeping or for the local authority to accept a homelessness duty • Applicant is unable to move on from temporary or other unsettled accommodation without provision of assistance • Applicant is at high risk of needing to enter hospital, care home or other supported living facility without provision of assistance • Provision of assistance must result in prevention/alleviation of homelessness or sustainment of independent living and must be sustainable for at least 6 months 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provision of voucher or payment to third party.

6. Application Process

- 6.1 Applications for Crisis Living Support and Re-Settlement Support must be made online at <https://selfserve.worcester.gov.uk/dwaswcc/login.jsp>
 Requests for logins can be made to housing@worcester.gov.uk

6.2 The referrer will be asked to complete a series of questions to confirm that the applicant is eligible for the scheme and that they meet all the criteria set out within this document. These questions will include:-

- Applicant and other household members' details to include name, address, national insurance number and date of birth.
- Confirmation that the referrer has seen proof of number of household members (NI numbers, child benefit award letter, UC award breakdown).
- Confirmation that the referrer has had sight of a recent award letter for one of the eligible benefits (no more than 3 months old).
- Confirmation that the need cannot be met by another source to include friends and family.
- Confirmation that the applicant does not have own resources or savings.
- Confirmation that the applicant has a local connection - has lived in Worcester City for more than 6 months or has a local connection as a result of special circumstances.
- Confirmation that the client is in one of the eligible priority groups and that failure to provide the requested support would have a negative impact on their health.
- Details of why the award is required, what crisis the household is experiencing and what makes this application an exceptional circumstance.
- Completion of a financial assessment, to include all the household's income and expenditure. Where the financial assessment indicates that the household has the means to obtain the required item or assistance within a reasonable period of time, the referrer should consider that the applicant is ineligible and an application should not be submitted. Where referral agencies are found to have inappropriately submitted multiple applications which are ineligible on financial grounds, Worcester City Council reserves the right to suspend an agency's ability to refer into the scheme, subject to further investigation.

Outcome Notification

- 6.3 In the case of applications for energy and food vouchers, where all eligibility criteria are met, the online system will advise the referrer of the outcome of the application immediately and will generate an automatic confirmation email. A further email will be sent later with details of the voucher and how to use it. Where a discretionary application is required because the applicant does not meet all eligibility criteria, the referrer will be notified of the outcome of the application within 2 working days (provided sufficient information has been provided to make a decision). Any decision on discretionary applications is final and a refusal cannot be appealed.
- 6.4 In the case of applications for White Goods and Essential Items all applications will be subject to additional eligibility checks in terms of previous awards, financial assessment etc. following the submission of the application. A decision on the outcome of these applications will be made by a Manager or Team Leader within the Strategic Housing Service at Worcester City Council within 10 working days of receipt of all necessary supporting information.
- 6.5 For successful White Goods applications, the referrer and applicant will be contacted by Worcester Municipal Charities separately to arrange delivery of the goods. For successful Essential Items applications, the referrer will be contacted by Worcester City Council with details of the items awarded and arrangements for provision.
- 6.6 For unsuccessful applications, the referrer will be contacted by Worcester City Council to advise of the outcome and reason(s) for refusal.
- 6.7 Where additional information is required to make a decision on White Goods or Essential Items applications, or where a discretionary application is required because the applicant does not meet all eligibility criteria, a decision will be made by a Manager or Team Leader within the Strategic Housing Service at Worcester City Council and the referrer will be notified of the outcome of the application within 10 working days (provided sufficient information has been provided to make a decision). Any decision on discretionary applications is final and a refusal cannot be appealed.
- 6.8 The scheme will operate during normal office hours and does not include "out of hours" (i.e. weekend, evening and Bank Holiday) provision.

7. Fraudulent Applications

- 7.1 In order to protect the integrity of the scheme and to ensure that public finances are being used appropriately, regular checks will be undertaken by Worcester City Council regarding the eligibility of applicants and the veracity of applications submitted.
- 7.2 It is the referral agency's responsibility to ensure that all information provided in support of an application is accurate and complete. In the event that inaccurate information is found to have been provided, Worcester City Council reserves the right to suspend an agency's ability to refer into the scheme, subject to further investigation.
- 7.3 In the event that an applicant is found to have sold or given away any item awarded through the scheme, Worcester City Council reserves the right to take re-possession of the item or, where the item is no longer available, invoice the applicant for the value of the item awarded. The applicant will be ineligible for any further award through the scheme.
- 7.4 Referral agencies should undertake thorough checks of the information provided by applicants prior to submitting an application to the Worcester City DWAS. Where a referral agency is found to have submitted multiple applications without adequately verifying the eligibility and need of the applicant, Worcester City Council reserves the right to suspend an agency's ability to refer into the scheme, subject to further investigation.