

**SOCIAL FUND
REPLACEMENT SCHEME –
(EMERGENCY AND
WELFARE FUND)
SERVICE MODEL**

Social Fund Replacement – Proposed ‘Emergency and Welfare Fund’ Service Model

1. Service model Proposal

1.1 The Emergency and Welfare Fund (EWF) service model is based on 8 principles and reflects the views of the people and panels we consulted. It is work in progress and will be updated regularly to reflect the delivery process as it is monitored and reviewed against performance targets and budget pressures. The key service delivery principles will be integrated into the service model as follows:

2. Service delivery principles:

2.1. Limiting the amount of spend to the funding we receive from Government:

The transferred budget for the fund is £1,064,046 including administration. Given that demand on the service is anticipated to rise, we will need to minimise administration costs in order to deliver within budget. Weekly budget forecasting and monitoring to agreed levels of spend will be essential – see para 5 below. Financial adjustments will be required if the spend shows significant differences from that projected. This will be the responsibility of the service manager who will escalate changes for investigation.

2.2. Limiting the scheme to Plymouth residents: Residency will be established using various existing systems within the council such as Council Tax details. Residency for homeless people will be established via contact with professionals in housing and the community and voluntary sector.

2.3. Delivering the award from the most appropriate location: The EWF will be administered by a team of officers (4 officers and a Team Leader) based in the Revenues and Benefits service with wider responsibility for the administration and monitoring of other discretionary funds, such as the Council Tax Support Vulnerability Fund and Discretionary Housing Payment Fund (DHP). They will carry out benefit health checks with customers, and be responsible for signposting customers, where required, to relevant welfare and money advice agencies.

2.3.1 We will encourage the majority of requests to come via the telephone. Claims will also be possible via the internet and face to face requests at the Civic Centre. Initial details to assess an application will be taken via these methods. Advertising and promotional activities will be designed to target the more vulnerable members of our communities.

2.4. Eligibility based on benefit entitlement and/or low income: An individual will make an application. Some applications will be in relation to one person i.e. the applicant. Others will be in relation to their families/households e.g. dependants like partners, children and people they care for, who in many cases maybe vulnerable for a range of reasons. In emergency situations, eligibility will be based on the amount of disposable income the applicant/household has available to them at the time they make an application. This requires an assessment of incomings and outgoings against the indicated emergency.

2.4.1. When assessing the eligibility of the application, indicators like vulnerability, the type and cause of the crisis and the potential impact of the intervention, will all be taken into account. Where we identify the need for advice and support about money management to prevent repeat applications, we will ensure that our offer of support is linked to an expectation of medium to longer term engagement by the individual/family with this.

2.5. Providing crisis and welfare responses: The EWF provides crisis and non-crisis support. Where an applicant is in crisis, and has no availability to other sources of support, the EWF will consider applications for the following items e.g.

- Food – based on number in household and number of days support required
- Utilities – to include consideration of emergency and debt payments on a meter
- Emergency travel – e.g. if stranded away from home
- Provision of household goods where urgently required.

2.5.1 Where the applicant is not in crisis, the EWF will consider applications for the following reasons e.g.

- Someone moving out of institutional care or residential care
- Someone needing help to stay in their own home
- An individual that has had an unsettled way of life and a recognised organisation is resettling them
- Someone needing help because a prisoner or young offender is going to be living with them while they are on release on a temporary license.

2.5.2 Other items/services may be considered on application, dependent upon pressing need. Payments for rent in advance are not eligible within the EWF, and will be administered through the DHP fund.

2.5.3. The response will be limited to a *maximum* of 14 days provision and two crisis payments per year. Anyone claiming a second crisis payment during the year, will be required to show evidence, as appropriate, of efforts to address their situation (see para 6).

2.5.4 For food, the awards will be made based on the criteria below. This will be subject to review and re-evaluation against economic data about food prices and the EWF's capacity.

Household type

- Single person - £7.50 per day
- Couple - £12.75 per day
- Family with 1 child - £15.00 per day
- Family with 2/3 children - £19.50
- Family with 4/5 children - £24.00
- Family with 6+ children - £26.25

2.5.5. In the case of utilities, we will consider covering the cost up to and including a maximum of 14 days cover, based on the applicant's daily usage. This will be done in a variety of ways including,

- Requesting the customer to provide their latest amenity bill if they have one
- Calling the appropriate utility company to request the anticipated daily spend
- The team manager making a decision on the amount awarded if the above options are not available.

2.6 Minimising administration costs and administering from PCC: Funding from the EWF will contribute to the running costs of the team described in 2.1. Any underspend of the administration fund would go back into the EWF for front line service delivery.

2.7 Providing goods and services and cash: Our EWS will provide cash as a standard response to a crisis. Goods provided under the non-crisis criteria will be new, at most competitive rates available: Cash will be considered only in cases where these goods or services cannot be delivered to the applicant through other routes.

2.8 Limiting awards: applications for non-crisis needs are not limited under the EWF and will be judged on merit subject to section 6. Eligibility for crisis payments is limited to two applications per person/household subject to section 6 and any new and significant factors since the previous application. Applicants who have regular issues e.g. loss/theft of moneys and have not taken recommended action to prevent reoccurrence, should not generally be awarded a second award within a year, unless vulnerability is considered an overriding factor.

3. Applying for assistance

3.1. Applicants can make a claim via the routes outlined in 2.3.1. Individuals and representatives/advocates will be able to support this process with the consent of the applicant. Once all necessary evidence is provided, claims will generally be processed within the following timescales (Monday to Friday except bank holidays 9am - 4.30pm)

- Crisis applications (e.g. food) – processed within one hour and advised via the same route as their claim was made
- Non-crisis applications (e.g. furniture) – processed within 3-10 working days.

3.2 Customers may be required to attend the Civic Centre to collect their entitlement.

3.3 Unsuccessful applicants will be referred to other places where they may get support e.g. food banks, soup kitchens, charities etc.

3.4 For all non-crisis needs, such as white goods or furniture, and dependent on the circumstances, we would aim to process an application in 3-10 working days. Provision of goods/services will mainly be via a cash system. In some cases the officer may be able to order the goods directly online for the applicant and pay online. In other cases we will need to hand the cash to the applicant to enable them to purchase what they require. The amount awarded will depend on the market at the time and will include sale items where we are able to search online for the most competitive price.

4. Reviews against initial decision

4.1 Applicants can ask to have the decision about their request reviewed. This will be carried out by a senior officer to the one that has made the initial assessment.

4.2 All requests for a review must be made within one working day of being given the decision. No review will be undertaken if the request is outside this time line. Senior officers will have the maximum of one working day to consider the appeal from the time it is submitted to giving the applicant the outcome.

4.3 Customers will have the right to make complaints to the ombudsman if they are concerned about the way the process has been carried out.

5. Managing the budget

5.1 A weekly budget monitoring exercise will be overseen by the manager of the team against the projected spending below. If spending shows significant difference from that projected, the issue will be escalated for investigation.

Month (2011/12)	% of annual spend (2011/12)	Equivalent spend 2013/14 ¹
April	7.5	£65,882
May	9.1	£79,936
June	8.8	£77,301
July	8.7	£76,423
August	8.3	£72,909
September	8.6	£75,544
October	8	£70,274
November	8.6	£75,544
December	6.8	£59,740
January	8.4	£73,787
February	8.7	£75,544
March	8.7	£75,544

6. Supporting the customer

6.1 A core aspect of the EWF is that it will offer support to the customer through information, signposting and referrals to other organisations. This may include accessing advice on,

- Debt
- Income maximisation
- Budgeting
- Alcohol/drugs
- Healthy eating
- Work skills
- Family intervention/support
- Housing/homelessness support
- Domestic Abuse.

6.2 There will be an expectation that the applicant would 'help themselves' where possible in terms of improving their situation in the short to medium term and minimising potential for repeat claims. The recommended course of action will be recorded and evidence that they have made efforts to improve the situation will be requested, as appropriate, if that applicant needs to make a second claim within a year.

¹ Based on indicative settlement figure of £878,428 – this may change when we hear more about the confirmed funding levels