



**Brent**

Brent Council

Local Welfare Assistance (LWA) Scheme

## **1. Introduction**

**1.1** Local Welfare Assistance (LWA) is a new discretionary support scheme designed and administered by Brent Council from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2013. This document provides a summary of the key points of the LWA scheme and aims to facilitate consistency of decision making. It is intended to allow flexibility for proper embedding of the operation of the scheme in local services, infrastructure and partnerships.

**1.2** The LWA scheme must be reviewed within six months of its commencement to evaluate compliance with the predictive Equalities Impact Assessment conducted and to enable any changes to be considered and implemented as appropriate. Such changes shall be submitted to the Council's Executive for prior approval. Policy matters will be reviewed at least annually to assist decision makers.

**1.3** The LWA scheme has been developed following consultation responses from key stakeholders and existing Brent customers of the Social Fund Crisis Loan scheme.

**1.4** The LWA scheme is a discretionary scheme. The guidance cannot cover all eventualities. It is intended to provide a framework for decision makers to promote consistency in decision making, alongside the application process and training materials. Decision makers should use their discretion to ensure that the underlying objectives of the fund are met. The absence of specific guidance on a particular situation does not necessarily mean that a payment should be refused.

## **2. Policy Context**

**2.1** The UK Government's December 2010 White Paper *Universal Credit: welfare that works* set out plans to reform the Social Fund. The existing system of discretionary payments will be abolished and replaced by:

- a new locally-based provision which will replace Community Care Grants and Crisis Loans for general living expenses (the subject of this guidance); and
- a new nationally administered advance of benefits facility administered by the DWP which will replace Budgeting Loans, Crisis Loan Alignment payments and Interim Payments (those made to claimants with immediate needs while awaiting payment of their benefit award).

**2.2** Funding for provision of successor arrangements to Crisis Loans for living expenses and Community Care Grants will transfer from the DWP to local authorities. The new locally based service will be implemented from 1 April 2013, and Crisis Loans for living expenses and Community Care Grants will be withdrawn on 31 March 2013. The regulated Social Fund (Sure Start maternity grants, funeral

payments, winter fuel payments and cold weather payments) will remain the responsibility of the DWP.

**2.3** There is no ring fencing attached to the funds devolved to local authorities. Nor is there any duty to provide a particular type of service. The Brent Council scheme is intended to replicate as far as reasonably practicable the existing national scheme provisions, although this will be reviewed having regard to local experience and monitoring data. Brent Council will be applying the full amount of Government funding received for providing a discretionary scheme (i.e. £855,509) towards this purpose.

## **Equalities Impact Assessment**

**2.4** A predictive Equalities Impact Assessment for the introduction of the LWA scheme has been conducted by Brent Council. The assessment indicated that there is no current evidence to suggest that a group or groups are likely to be adversely affected by the scheme.

The recording and monitoring of equalities data will be undertaken for LWA applications and a full review of the new service will be conducted within the first six months of implementation to permit any revisions of the scheme to be considered and implemented accordingly.

## **3. Purpose**

**3.1** The provision of a local discretionary scheme that offers financial assistance is to be implemented as a consequence of the cessation of the national Social Fund provisions for Crisis Loans (CL's) and Community Care Grants (CCG's). Consequently the primary objectives of the LWA scheme mirror those of CCG's and CL's by aiming to help:

- people in short-term need because of a crisis or emergency
- support vulnerable people in the community
- ease exceptional pressure on families

To help meet these objectives the LWA scheme is comprised of two distinct types of assistance; **Crisis Payments (CSPs)** and **Community Payments (CMPs)**. These two payments share many characteristics with CLs and CCGs respectively, however, as outlined in this guide there are also a number of key differences.

**3.2** CSPs and CMPs are available to people who do not have alternative means of paying for what they need. The payments are intended to meet one-off needs rather

than on-going expenses. Except in the case of fraud or avoidable applicant error, the payments do not need to be paid back.

**3.3** It is anticipated that likely customers of the LWA scheme (though not an exhaustive list) will include residents and prospective residents as set out below:

- disabled persons
- persons with mental health issues
- single parents in receipt of benefits
- unemployed persons in receipt of means tested benefits
- Persons of pensionable age
- Care leavers
- Persons in temporary accommodation
- Ex-offenders.

#### **4. Allocation and financial management of the fund**

**4.1** For 2013/14 the Government has allocated Brent funding of £855,509 for its programme. This has been modelled based on previous year's expenditure for CLs and CCGs in the Brent area. This represents a 13% reduction based on figures for 2011/12<sup>1</sup>.

##### **Financial Management Approach**

**4.2** There is a fixed amount of budget to spend on the provision of financial assistance to Brent customers and with the combined impact of welfare reform it is likely that demand for LWA payments will be high.

**4.3** The LWA budget allocation is fixed and cannot be overspent.

**4.4** There is an acknowledgement that establishing accurate budget profiling will not initially be easily established given that the scheme is new. It is also recognised that further changes to welfare reform will potentially have an impact on payment application frequency and value.

##### **Monthly Prioritisation Control with Annual Spend Cap**

**4.5** The Council will seek to profile budgets on a monthly basis in order to assist in the effective budgetary management of funds over the financial year.

**4.6** The budget holder will assess the demand pattern of actual activity against budget profile throughout the financial year and make a decision on whether the amount and type of awards to be made should be restricted if appropriate to

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<sup>1</sup> Full figures for 2012/13 are not yet available.

prevent a budget overspend from occurring. This shall be based upon the extent of any variance that has arisen between the profiled budget for the scheme and the actual expenditure incurred and any other relevant information that is appropriate.

**4.7** It is envisaged that the budget holder issue advice at least on a monthly basis, which specifies the type and level of award that can be met having regard to available funding and priorities.

## **5. A Holistic Approach**

**5.1** LWA payments are not intended to take over the statutory community care responsibilities of Brent Council; however there are many ways in which CMPs and CSPs can complement the care already provided by both Brent and voluntary agencies.

**5.2** The Council already works alongside agencies such as Job Centre Plus and the Citizens Advice, including co-location with representatives of both, to provide a fully joined up advice and assistance service. These pre-existing links will assist in building the applicants capacity to manage their own affairs in the longer term and this wider support will help to prevent repeated applications. Applicants may benefit from:

- Financial advice (including budgeting, financial education, debt advice, ways of saving money)
- Support to maximise income (including benefits advice and support in applying for benefits)
- Support for housing and tenancy issues including, but not limited to, housing support services for tenancy sustainment, advice on landlord/tenant disputes and home ownership issues.
- Signposting to other services and other information (including information about fuel efficiency, loft insulation, safer homes, the value of home contents insurance etc.)
- Mediation and advocacy support (including citizens advice and welfare rights)
- “Resilience” support (including befriending, building local networks, education training and employability support)

**5.3** Where appropriate decision makers will instruct applicants to comply with any reasonable conditions, such as agreeing to seek debt advice or attend a free job skills course, as a prerequisite for an LWA award.

## **6. Local Welfare Assistance Scheme**

**6.1** The LWA scheme is comprised of two types of assistance; **Crisis Payments (CSPs)** and **Community Payments (CMPs)**. Awards of these payments are made to cover different needs.

**6.2** CMPs are primarily intended to help vulnerable people live as independent a life as possible in the community.

**6.3** CMP awards are generally made to cover the cost of furniture and white goods, connection and removal costs, minor repairs in some types of accommodation, travel costs and clothing and footwear (not school uniforms). Note that these are just examples and if a situation is not mentioned, it does not mean that an award would be refused, as the Council will review the individual circumstances of each application.

**6.4** CSPs are intended to cover immediate short-term needs which will prevent serious risk to the health or safety of a person or their family. They can also help with certain expenses in other emergency or disaster situations. For example, a serious flood, causing substantial damage, loss or destruction to possessions or property, replacement of urgently needed furniture, cookers, beds, household equipment, heaters, food and utilities and clothing and footwear.

**6.5** CSPs can also be paid for deposits and rent in advance if someone is being resettled (and would be eligible for a CMP).

## **7(A). Who can apply for a Community Payment?**

**7.1** To be entitled to a Community Payment the applicant must:

- be aged 16 or over  
and
- have their sole or main residence in Brent (or be intending to have their sole or main residence in Brent)  
and
- be in receipt of a qualifying benefit (or about to be in receipt of a qualifying benefit)  
and
- not have capital in excess of £400 for persons not of pensionable age and £800 in the case of persons of pensionable age. (Any amount above these levels will be netted off against any award entitlement)  
and
- not be a person subject to immigration control  
and
- not be eligible (or in receipt of as the case may be) for a Short-Term Advance of Benefit payment, Budgeting Loan or Budgeting Advance from DWP that could meet the need  
and
- excepting where a prison sentence has been served in consequence of such a finding, not have been found guilty in a UK court of law for making a fraudulent application for a Local Welfare Assistance Payment or Council Tax

Support / Housing Benefit / Council Tax Benefit within the past 12 months or accepted an administrative penalty as an alternative to prosecution

and

- not be seeking support to pay for an excluded item
- and
- be willing to comply with any reasonable conditions concerning the payment award including for example, support from advice agencies (or similar)
- and
- not have had more than two awards of a Community Payment in any rolling twelve month period excepting in exceptional circumstances. (e.g. moving home)

**7.2** In general an applicant intending to have their sole or main residence in Brent would be entitled to a CMP in limited circumstances only, such as if they are fleeing domestic violence or leaving institutional care. These are examples and not an exhaustive list.

**7.3** The qualifying benefits for CMPs are listed below:

- Income Support
- Job Seekers Allowance (Income Based)
- Employment and Support Allowance (Income Related)
- Pension Credit
- Universal Credit

**7.4** The term 'about to be in receipt of a qualifying benefit' allows for awards in cases such as where a person is homeless or fleeing domestic violence for example and has not yet claimed or received a qualifying benefit.

**7.5** The main examples of capital to be taken into account, though not an exhaustive list are:

- Current accounts
- Savings accounts
- National savings certificates
- Fixed term investments
- Stocks and shares
- Endowment policies which are not held as security over property
- Friendly society or other deposit accounts
- Trust funds
- Property other than the applicant's home

**7.6** The excluded items are all those included at 7.15 and those listed below:

- Repairs and improvements to the home (except minor repairs and improvements)

- Anything the council has a duty to provide
- Daily living expenses

**7.7** Reasonable conditions that applicants may be required to agree to include but are not limited to seeking money, debt or budgeting advice or attending a free job skills course offered by Brent Council.

It is important to note that where an applicant is unable to comply with any reasonable conditions proposed and provided that the reason for the non compliance is also reasonable, it may be appropriate to defer the compliance requirement until an agreed date when the applicant is able to comply.

## **7(B) Who can apply for a Crisis Payment?**

**7.8** To be entitled to a Crisis Payment the applicant must:

- be aged 16 or over  
and
- have their sole or main residence in Brent (or be intending to have their sole or main residence in Brent)  
and
- be in receipt of a qualifying benefit (or about to be in receipt of a qualifying benefit)  
and
- not be an excluded person as defined at 7.13  
and
- not have access to any funds (including insurance) that can be relied on to meet the need they are applying for support with and where they would be left with insufficient resources which would cause serious risk to their own, or their family's health or safety  
and
- not have already had two awards for a Crisis Payment in any rolling 12 month period excepting in the case of a disaster  
and
- be willing to comply with any reasonable conditions concerning the payment award including for example, support from advice agencies (or similar)  
and
- in the case of a second payment application, be able to demonstrate compliance of any reasonable conditions specified by the Council when the first payment was made  
and
- not be a person subject to immigration control (excepting in the case of a 'disaster')  
and
- not be eligible (or in receipt of as the case may be) for a Short-Term Advance of Benefit payment from DWP

and

- excepting where a prison sentence has been served in consequence of such a finding or in the case of a crisis payment for a disaster, not have been found guilty in a UK court of law for making a fraudulent application for a Brent Local Welfare Assistance Payment or Council Tax Support / Housing Benefit / Council Tax Benefit within the past 12 months (or accepted an administrative penalty as an alternative to prosecution)

and

- not be seeking support to pay for an excluded item

**7.9** In general an applicant intending to have their sole or main residence in Brent would be entitled to a CSP in limited circumstances only, such as if they are fleeing domestic violence or leaving institutional care. These are examples and not an exhaustive list.

**7.10** The qualifying benefits for CSPs are listed below:

- Income Support
- Job Seekers Allowance (Income Based)
- Employment and Support Allowance (Income Related)
- Pension Credit
- Working Tax Credit
- Child Tax Credit
- Universal Credit

**7.11** The term ‘about to be in receipt of a qualifying benefit’ allows for awards in cases such as where a person is homeless or fleeing domestic violence for example and has not yet claimed or received a qualifying benefit.

The qualifying benefit provision shall not generally apply in the case of a “disaster situation” in order to align with the “immigration control” requirement.

**7.12** Reasonable conditions that applicants may be required to agree to include but are not limited to seeking money, debt or budgeting advice or attending a free job skills course offered by Brent Council. The reasonable condition(s) applied will broadly aim to mitigate any future need for a payment for the same or similar reasons.

It is important to note that where an applicant is unable to comply with any reasonable conditions proposed and provided that the reason for the non compliance is also reasonable, it may be appropriate to defer the compliance requirement until an agreed date when the applicant is able to comply.

**7.13** Excluded persons are listed below:

- Care home residents and hospital in-patients unless it is planned that they will be discharged within the following 2 weeks

- Persons who are members of and fully maintained by a religious order
- Persons receiving education and thus not entitled to Income Support, Jobseeker's Allowance (Income Based) or Employment and Support Allowance (Income Related)
- Prisoners who are in prison or released on temporary licence
- Persons on bail pending a court hearing.
- Persons that live at home with their friends or family excepting where they have a commercial rent liability and / or Council Tax liability for the premises concerned. This provision also does not apply if the applicant lives at home with their friends or family but is at genuine risk of homelessness or where other similar / statutory considerations may apply

**7.14** The criteria excluding applications due to immigration status and receipt of a qualifying benefit shall not generally apply in the case of 'disaster' situations.

**7.15** The excluded needs and items are listed below:

- Any need that occurs outside of the UK
- An educational or training need including: clothing and tools, distinctive school uniform or sports clothes for use at school, equipment to be used at school, travelling expenses to or from school, school meals taken during school holidays by children who are entitled to free school meals Clothing or equipment to be used at school
- Expenses in connection with court (legal proceedings) such as legal fees, court fees, fines, costs, damages, subsistence or travelling expenses
- Removal or storage charges if the person is being re-housed following a compulsory purchase order, a redevelopment or closing order or a compulsory exchange of tenancies.
- domestic assistance and respite care
- Repair to Local Authority property or the property of housing trusts
- A medical, surgical, optical, aural or dental item or service (note that needs under all of these headings can be provided free of charge by the National Health Service, if are getting Income Support, income-based Jobseeker's Allowance, Employment and Support Allowance (income-related), or Pension Credit). Medical expenses, treatments, items and medications.
- Work related expenses
- Debts to government departments
- Investments
- Telephony costs
- Mobility needs
- Holidays
- Television/ radio costs
- Motor vehicle costs
- Housing Costs, including but not limited to service charges, mortgage payments and rent

- Council tax, community charges and water rates
- Emergency travel expenses where the applicant is stranded away from home where the travel is in consequence of a business trip, holiday, vacation or other similar type of absence from their sole or main residence in Brent.

## **Sanctions and Disallowances**

**7.16** LWA payments should not undermine DWP's sanctions and disallowances. If a person is subject to a disallowance or a sanction by the DWP, and their benefit is reduced as a result, a CSP should only be awarded to meet expenses which are the consequence of a disaster. The applicant may be able to get a hardship payment from the DWP which will generally be treated as though it were JSA(IB).

## **8. Decision making for Community Payments**

**8.1** In order the questions that must be considered when deciding a CMP award are:

- 1. Does the applicant satisfy the eligibility criteria as defined at 7(A)?**
- 2. Would a CMP help satisfy one of the following objectives?**
  - Help the applicant establish themselves in the community
  - Help the applicant remain in the community
  - Help with the care of a prisoner or young offender on release on temporary licence
  - Ease exceptional pressures on the applicant and/or their family
  - Help the applicant set up home as a part of a resettlement programme
  - Assist with certain travelling expenses
- 3. What is the priority of each item / service?**
  - Consider the nature, extent and urgency of need
  - Consider the consequences of refusal
  - Consider the possibility that some other agency or body may wholly or partly meet the need
- 4. Is there sufficient budget to cover the item(s) or service(s)?**
  - Consider the budget allocation for the relevant period
  - The budget should be prioritised to help those most in need
- 5. Having decided whether to make an award:**
  - Does the applicants capital affect the amount of the award (apply the £400 / £800 netting off rule)
  - Is the award greater than the minimum £30 limit (excepting for travel expenses)

- An award for any item should be based on the costs of the items required and any other relevant information appropriate to the application.

## **9. Decision making for Crisis Payments**

**9.1** In order the questions that must be considered when deciding a CSP award are:

**1. Does the applicant satisfy the eligibility criteria as defined at 7(B)?**

**2. Would a CSP help satisfy one of the following objectives:**

- Help meet living expenses in order to prevent serious risk to the health or safety of a person or their family
- Help secure accommodation to prevent homelessness
- Help pay rent in advance if the applicant is leaving care

In a disaster situation such as flooding, fire, chemical leak or explosion:

- Help replace urgently needed household equipment and utilities

**3. What is the priority of need? In practice, expenses which may prevent serious risk to health or safety are by their very nature high priority, but:**

- Consider the nature, extent and urgency of need (must be current)
- Consider the consequences of refusal
- Consider the existence of resources the applicant may have to meet the need (e.g. overdrafts, family help, credit union<sup>2</sup>)
- Consider the possibility that some other agency or body may wholly or partly meet the need

**4. Is there sufficient budget to cover the award?**

- Consider the budget allocation for the relevant period
- The budget should be prioritised to help those most in need

**5. Having decided to make an award:**

- Consider how many days living expenses are required (with a maximum of 7 days allowed)
- Consider the appropriate amount to pay for living expenses with reference to 9.2, 9.3 and 9.4.
- In the case of rent in advance or goods an award should be based on the estimated costs and any other relevant information appropriate to the application.

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<sup>2</sup> Where appropriate the Council may signpost locally available sources of credit but there is no expectation that applicants should take high cost credit to cover living expenses.

**9.2** The maximum amount that can be paid for any CSP is outlined in 9.3 and 9.4. However, Brent Officers can make a judgement to pay less than the maximum amount based on the individual circumstances of each application.

**9.3** The maximum amount of any CSP for day to day living expenses where the applicant and / or their partner is liable for rent, accommodation charges in a hostel or board and lodging, Council Tax (or would be liable if the dwelling were not exempt), shall be capped at 60% of the Council Tax Support (CTS) personal allowance for the relevant financial year (i.e. 1<sup>st</sup> April to 31<sup>st</sup> March) in relation to the period concerned for the applicant (and any partner if applicable), and 100% of the CTS personal allowance applicable for any dependent children.

**9.4** Where the applicant resides in the home of a relative, friend or other person, the maximum amount shall be capped at 30% of the CTS personal allowance for the relevant financial year in relation to the period concerned.

## **10. Circumstances in which applicants might be awarded a Local Welfare Assistance Payment**

**10.1** This section gives more information on the circumstances in which a payment may be awarded. They are not exhaustive and Brent Officers may use their discretion to determine the form of support that an applicant needs. Consideration will be given to the needs, characteristics and circumstances of the individual when making a decision.

**10.2** CMPs are generally awarded to help vulnerable people live as independent a life as possible in the community.

**10.3** CMPs can be awarded to pay for the following items and services. This list is not exhaustive:

- Furniture, household equipment, connection charges
- Minor repairs
- Removal expenses and storage charges
- Fares when moving home
- Clothing (in some circumstances)

**10.4** CMPs can be awarded to an applicant if they are leaving accommodation in which they received significant and substantial care, such as:

- hospital or other medical establishment
- care home
- hostel or shelter
- staff intensive sheltered housing
- Local Authority care and foster care

- prison or detention centre

**10.4** Not only must the applicant be leaving care, they must also be establishing themselves in the community. It is generally necessary for someone leaving care to move into accommodation that would assist in preventing readmission to care, such as in an area where they would have access to help and support.

**10.5** CMPs can be made to applicants to help them to stay in the community rather than enter accommodation to receive care. Most commonly these would be awarded to elderly, vulnerable or disabled applicants. One of the factors Brent Officers will consider is how immediate is the likelihood of going into such accommodation, and whether the type of item or service requested would prevent this happening. Examples include:

- Help with expenses for improving a home to maintain living conditions, (except where the property is owned by a Local Authority or Housing Trust)
- Enabling an applicant to move to care for someone, including travel expenses
- Enabling the applicant to move to more suitable accommodation, to prevent unnecessary admission to care
- Enabling someone to move nearer to someone who can offer them support, to prevent admission to care

**10.6** CMPs may be awarded if the applicant is about to move into their own accommodation as part of a planned resettlement programme or following a period of homelessness.

**10.7** CMPs may be awarded to meet needs that arise out of exceptional pressure due to a particular problem. Some examples of what might be judged to be exceptional pressure are:

- To meet the needs of a child where the need arises out of chronic illness, accident or disability.
- There has been a breakdown of relationships, perhaps including domestic violence, resulting in a move.
- There is a serious problem with accommodation, for example structural problems, which is resulting in a move.

**10.8** CMPs may be awarded in principle, for example subject to the successful agreement of a tenancy, to be paid at a later date. This is to allow applicants and their support workers to plan ahead.

**10.9** CSPs are generally awarded to meet expenses that have arisen as a result of an emergency or disaster in order to avoid serious damage or serious risk to the health or safety of the applicant or their family.

**10.10** CSPs for living expenses can be awarded to meet immediate short term needs for a period until the applicant's next income is due or for a maximum of seven days, whichever is shorter.

**10.11** The need for a CSP must be current at the time of application, not an anticipated need.

### **What Constitutes an Emergency or Disaster?**

**10.12** An emergency is an unforeseen circumstance of pressing need which needs immediate action. A CSP is to pay for expenses to get out of an emergency situation rather than costs from a past emergency which has now been resolved.

How the emergency came about is not relevant, even if the applicant might be judged to have caused it or to have been able to avoid it. However, the reason for the emergency should inform any reasonable condition imposed by the Brent Officer as a requirement of a successful CSP application.

**10.13** The most common examples of what might be considered an emergency and for which a CSP could potentially be awarded are:

- Due to mismanagement or unforeseen costs the applicant has spent all of their benefit and has no money for living expenses for themselves and their family.
- The applicant's money or giro has been lost or stolen (in which case it should have been reported to the police) and living expenses are required.
- Rent in advance is needed in order to secure accommodation when leaving care
- Help to secure short-term board and lodging to prevent homelessness

In all cases the applicant must show there is a serious risk to their or their families' health and safety.

**10.14** Disasters are events of great or sudden misfortune and will generally be far less common than emergencies. They will normally result in significant damage to, destruction or loss of, possessions or property. The following are examples, of what might be considered to be a disaster, and for which a CSP may be awarded:

- A serious flood or fire, causing substantial damage
- Loss or destruction to possessions or property for example due to gas explosion or a chemical leak

These are just examples; an award would not necessarily be paid in all of these cases. If a situation is not mentioned, it does not mean that an applicant would not get help.

## **11. Application Process**

**11.1** LWA applications must be made either on-line or by telephone. Where the applicant is unable to use either of these methods applications can be made in a designated Brent Council office<sup>3</sup> with the assistance of a Brent Officer.

**11.2** If an application is made on behalf of a person, by someone other than an appointee, that person will usually be required to give their consent in writing to the application being made on their behalf. The Council may make an exception if this is an unreasonable demand on the applicant and is satisfied the third party is acting in the applicants best interests.

**11.3** Other agencies or support services or another part of the Council may encourage an applicant to make an application and, if the Council permits, may be allowed to apply on their behalf.

**11.4** In most cases it is anticipated that it will be possible to make CSP and CMP decisions from the information gathered on the application form and by telephone.

**11.5** Further information and evidence may be necessary if:

- There is insufficient evidence provided in the application form
- There is reason to doubt the validity of the application or the identity of the applicant is unclear
- There are inconsistencies or anomalies arising from cross referencing with previous applications

**11.6** Where it is necessary to seek further information or clarify an aspect of the application this will generally be resolved by either:

- Contacting the applicant via phone; or
- Checking departmental records.

## **Evidence**

**11.7** Evidence can be documentary, verbal or physical dependent upon the nature of the application and the facts concerned. Evidence may be derived from such sources as:

- The application
- Telephone or interview records
- Previous applications
- Computer systems
- Local knowledge
- Supporting documents and correspondence

**11.8** All telephone conversations will be summarised and recorded electronically if they are to be used as evidence that supports a decision.

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<sup>3</sup> The list of LWA designated offices can be found at [www.brent.gov.uk/lwa](http://www.brent.gov.uk/lwa)

**11.9** Evidence may also be provided by third parties, for example:

- Representatives of applicants
- Social workers
- Probation officers
- Medical doctors
- Housing departments
- Landlords

**11.10** Where the applicant provides third party details and further enquires are needed it would be appropriate to contact the third party, particularly a social worker or probation officer, if they are likely to be able to provide more detail.

**11.11** Exceptionally, it may be appropriate to ask the applicant if they would be able to provide any corroborating evidence they may have, such as:

- Estimate of cost of repair
- Estimate of cost of replacement
- Relevant evidence of a medical condition, for example, an existing doctor's note, a letter from a hospital or a prescription counterfoil.

**11.12** Brent Officers will only ask for as much supporting evidence from the applicant as is reasonable and necessary to support the application and should not:

- Ask for evidence which would incur any expense to the applicant
- **Insist** that the applicant provides supporting evidence, particularly from a third party
- Ask for evidence that is irrelevant to the decision.

If the applicant does not produce all evidence requested a decision will be made based on the completed application and any other evidence already held.

## **12. Award Process**

**12.1** In general all LWA payments will be made via pre-paid cards.

There is scope within the scheme for introducing other types of payment methods, for example via white goods delivered directly to the customer's home. The viability of and need for other payment mechanisms will be explored and potentially implemented during the life of the scheme.

**12.2** Pre-paid cards will be restricted so that they cannot be used where the merchant code for the item informs that it is not covered by the LWA scheme, this includes but is not limited to alcohol and tobacco.

**12.3** In general the pre-paid cards will be restricted so as not to permit withdrawal of cash from cash points. Where the need for cash is explicit in the reason for the application, for example for pre-pay gas or electricity, the restriction will be lifted although it should be noted that cash points will normally only permit withdrawals of amounts in multiples of £10.

**12.4** It is anticipated that prepaid cards for CMPs will generally be sent directly to the customer's home and will need to be activated by the customer to permit use.

**12.5** Pre-paid cards for CSPs will generally be collected by the applicant from a designated Brent office.

### **13. Decisions**

**13.1** The Council aims to make decisions on all LWA payments as soon as is reasonably possible, giving priority to CSPs over CMPs in terms of urgency.

**13.2** The applicant will be notified of the decision (either successful or unsuccessful) applying the means of communication specified by them as their preferred method giving information on:

- What was applied for
- The date of the application
- The result of the application
- Why the decision was made
- If successful, what has been awarded and where/how the payment will be made
- Other possible sources of help (for both successful and unsuccessful applications)
- How to ask for a review

### **14. Review Process**

**14.1** Except in the case where a decision to refuse a LWA payment was made due to lack of funds, if the applicant disagrees with the decision they may ask for a review.

**14.2** The review will be considered by an officer who was not involved in the original decision to refuse an award.

**14.3** Applications for reviews are required to be:

- Made within one month of the original decision.
- Made in writing or via phone and give reasons for disagreeing with the original decision.
- If made on behalf of the applicant consent is required from the applicant in writing or via phone.

**14.4** The officer carrying out the review will need to consider the original application and evidence to check that the decision complied with the guidance, took all available evidence into account, and was impartial and reasonable in the circumstances. Additional evidence, for example any new information provided in the review request letter, can also be taken into account.

## **15. Monitoring and Evaluation**

**15.1** Close monitoring of the operation of the LWA scheme will allow the Council to review and update the scheme to better meet local needs. In particular, information will be gathered about who is applying for assistance and any trends that may relate to the guidance, eligibility criteria or application process.

**15.2** Monitoring information may be used for:

- Performance improvement – to give the Council the information needed to improve performance and customer experience
- Benchmarking – against the previous scheme and other Local Authorities to identify areas for improvement or good practice
- Accountability – to satisfy the requirements to provide information on the performance of the scheme, including budgeting performance
- Informing – the future design of the scheme.

**15.3** The regular monitoring information will be integral to the evaluation of the scheme. In addition to statistical information, the evaluation will include:

- Customer feedback, and views from support workers and decision makers on the running of the new scheme, gathered via survey and comments.
- Information gathered from organisations, such as Citizens Advice Bureaus on how the new scheme is performing from a customer's, and customer representatives' perspective.
- Monitoring of the reasons for any complaints made by customers or their representatives.
- Feedback on how the scheme is embedded and linked to wider Council and other partner services.