

# **Tower Hamlets Resident Support Scheme**

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## **Summary**

Tower Hamlets Resident Support Scheme is intended to support the Council's aim of will tackling poverty in the Borough. The scheme will offer goods and services along with financial and welfare benefits advice to residents facing severe difficulties.

The aim of the scheme is to provide short term support to residents to help them to improve their situation in the long term, for example by moving into employment if they are subject to the Benefit Cap or by moving home if they are subject to the Social Sector Size Criteria.

The Resident Support Scheme will act as one of a suite of ways in which the Council will aim to help residents. The scheme will include elements of the previous Local Welfare Provision which replaced the Department for Work and Pensions' Social Fund provision devolved to local authorities in April 2013.

The scheme will target those residents at risk as well as those already in need of assistance. The scheme will work towards applying universal eligibility criteria to determine whether a resident qualifies for help.

The scheme will be used where the claimant has no other recourse to other help or assistance. It is intended to support those residents who do not have the funds to pay for fuel, food or essential household furniture/white goods.

Access to the scheme will be through self-referral, the Council's statutory services and 'trusted partners'.

The scheme will offer residents additional support and advice to help them in the long term. The Council recognises that for welfare reform the solution is not only to provide temporary financial assistance but rather to do everything we can to empower those affected and support them out of welfare reform, helping residents improve their long-term circumstances while at the same time building their own financial resilience. The scheme will link residents to financial capability advice, the credit union, advice agencies, employment services, and other available support services.

# Tower Hamlets Resident Support Scheme

## 1 Introduction

1.1 Tower Hamlets Resident Support Scheme will tackle poverty by offering support to residents facing severe difficulties. The aim of the scheme is to help residents in the short term while improving their financial situation by maximising their long term income. Advice will be given to residents about other forms of support that are readily available; benefits maximisation, energy efficiency advice and grants, Council Tax single persons discount, provision of financial advice etc.

1.2 The scheme will run for a two year period and will be reviewed on a regular basis to ensure that it is achieving its aims. During this time the Council will be working towards a broader support policy that will include a suite of measures including loans and Discretionary Housing Payments.

1.3 The scheme will ensure that the council provides an overarching response to welfare reform by providing an integrated support network and offering for residents. The scheme will ensure that the Council is able to respond to need more efficiently and effectively without the restrictions of some current schemes such as DHP, which can only be claimed by those households claiming housing benefit.

This will enable the Council to reduce its on-going budget allocation, whilst allotting funds from reserves for specific priority projects and initiatives to tackle poverty for residents of all ages as well as mitigating the wider effects of welfare reform.

1.4 The Government's welfare reforms, along with the roll out of Universal Credit and the reduction in council funding from Government means there will be more residents affected by the reforms with less funding available to help mitigate the effects.

1.5 This scheme represents an opportunity for the council to develop a more focused, flexible support provision which will lead to long term positive change for residents

## 2 Background

2.1 Local Welfare Provision was previously administered by DWP where it was known as the Social Fund. The provision was transferred to Local Authorities in April 2013 but since the end of the first year, the scheme's previously ring fenced funding has been absorbed into Government finance settlements to Local Authorities and it is no longer clear what, if any funding is actually still provided. The operation of the scheme is discretionary.

2.2 Tower Hamlets Council is committed to tackling poverty and has therefore chosen to continue to fund a scheme. However, it is important that the Council is able to get the best possible value for money from a scheme whilst ensuring that residents can access the support they need in a timely fashion.

### 3. Principles

3.1 The Resident Support scheme will incorporate the following principles:

#### 3.1.1 Outcome focussed

- Residents are assisted out of poverty
- Residents are provided with support and assistance to enable sustainable change
- Households are living in housing which is affordable and appropriate for their needs
- Households experience minimal disruption as a result of welfare reform
- Funding is used effectively and the amount reduced

**3.1.2 Effective targeting of spend:** The Council does not have sufficient funding to completely mitigate the impacts of Universal Credit and wider welfare reform as well as lifting other households out of poverty. Therefore, funding should be committed in a targeted fashion, providing the most impact possible. Funding streams that make up the Resident Support Scheme will not and cannot be used to make-up budget shortfalls and funding gaps in existing Council service support. Where other financial assistance is already provided this assistance will continue. An example of this would be payments made under Section 17 of the Children's Act by Children's Services. The scheme is intended to deliver value for money through effective procurement of goods and services.

**3.1.3 Holistic Understanding of need:** Through monitoring the goods and services provided and the reasons for application, the Council will work to understand the root causes of poverty to ensure that the correct advice is provided. This information will also help to inform projects that are commissioned across the borough for financial, employment and other support.

**3.1.4 Long term sustainable improvement:** The scheme will meet need by offering residents support to improve their long-term circumstances and help build their own financial resilience. The scheme will establish greater links with outreach and advice agencies to ensure residents are supported in relation to Universal Credit, sanctions, debt, rent arrears and council tax etc. At the same time the scheme will forge greater links with the credit union, Job Centre Plus, Age UK, advice agencies and employment services.

**3.1.5 Consistency in assessments and decision making:** the scheme is designed to enable professionals involved in assessing a person's need to make recommendations for awards, ensuring that decision making is fair, robust and consistent.

### 4 Funding

4.1 The Resident Support Scheme will be funded through the Mayor's Tackling Poverty fund until 2020. Provision will be reviewed during this time.

4.2 There will be no minimum or maximum award amount. The award will be determined using the criteria set out in this policy.

## 5 Types of support available

5.1 Awards will be made to qualifying residents in respect to the following:

- Essential household items such as fridges, cooking facilities etc
- Living Expenses e.g. food and heating
- School uniforms
- Cash will only be awarded where not providing it would put the household at risk. Where provided, this will be through means of a prepayment card which will be collectable from any local Credit Union office.

5.2 The scheme will not be used in respect of the following:

- Any request made where the assessment process deems that the need is not immediate or where alternative means of addressing the need is available
- Clothing (except in exceptional circumstances where someone is fleeing their home e.g. flood, fire, domestic violence)
- Minor structural repairs where these are the responsibility of the landlord or the owner.
- Furniture & household items where living in private rented furnished accommodation or furnished temporary accommodation where this is the responsibility of the landlord.
- Specialist disability equipment or adaptations, recliner chairs, wheelchairs and mobility scooters – we will refer to National Health Service provision for wheelchairs.
- Personal debts – we will refer to appropriate agencies for support.
- Phone costs or associated expenses

5.3 Cash payments will not usually be provided, instead, the scheme will offer goods and services. This may be achieved by provision of approved refurbished household items or by use of a supplier able to provide, supply and deliver new items which are guaranteed. Where it is agreed that a cash payment is required, this will be distributed by means of a prepayment card which can be posted or collected from a local Credit Union office.

## 6 Eligibility Criteria

6.1 Universal Eligibility Criteria - the basic principle is that a person must need the support requested and it would represent a risk to them or someone in their household

if assistance is not provided. The following are the basic universal eligibility criteria that a resident must usually meet in order to be considered to receive support. Meeting these criteria does not guarantee that support will be offered.

**Ineligible for Department for Work and Pensions support** – the applicant is not eligible for any loan or advance to meet their need. For the avoidance of doubt a person could be eligible for a loan or advance but the need and associated risk is such that an award should still be considered. The Council will

still reserve the right to refuse an application based on the circumstances of the case, but it will not be treated as an excluding factor in all cases.

**Residency** – the applicant must have been resident in the Borough for a minimum of 12 months, been placed in housing outside the borough by the London Borough of Tower Hamlets under its statutory homelessness duties or be providing a function that is supported by the London Borough of Tower Hamlets e.g. foster care.

**Responsibility of another Local Authority** – Where it is considered that the support requested is the responsibility of another Local Authority we reserve the right to signpost the person to that Local Authority before considering them for support from the Local Resident Support Scheme.

**Income** – A person must be on low income without the means to meet the need requested. Requests will be considered taking into account income and expenditure and the reason for the award. Expenditure will be defined as what the Council deems to be necessary expenditure which may differ from actual expenditure. Proof of income and expenditure will be required. Both residents on benefits and those who are working will be entitled to make an application under the scheme. Those with savings will either be ineligible, or will qualify for a reduced award based on the amount of capital they have.

**Immigration Status** – The scheme is only open to residents who have recourse to public funds.

**Previous Award** – As a general rule an applicant and/or their partner will only be entitled to one award in any 12 months period. The Council may offer a further award in exceptional circumstances at its discretion.

**Sanctions and disallowances-** Payments made under this scheme should not undermine sanctions imposed by DWP. Where someone is subject to sanctions or disallowances, an award should only be made in the case of a disaster or where a child is at risk. The applicant should first seek a hardship payment from the DWP.

### **Exceptions to universal criteria**

The Council understands that there will sometimes be instances where households do not meet these criteria but their personal circumstances make it appropriate for the Council to offer support under this scheme. This would include, but is not limited to:

People fleeing domestic or other abuse

Circumstances where the Council believes that not assisting would put a child or vulnerable adult at risk

Where it is considered that not awarding support would put other Council services under avoidable pressure

6.2 Criteria for assessment and methods of verification are supplied in the table below.

<b>Eligibility Criteria</b>	<b>Method of verification</b>
Resident in the Borough, linked to the Borough through Temporary Accommodation or provides a function on behalf of the Council	Confirmed links to the Council and Council services via liaison and/or systems
Applicant must have recourse to public funds	Council systems DWP Proof from client such as a passport or that they are exercising treaty rights
Verification of identity	Documentary evidence from the resident Council systems DWP
No award in the previous 12 months	Council system
Resident is not eligible for other support from a statutory service or the DWP.	Application form check. Council systems
Additional support	For each application consider referral for finance, debt and/or welfare benefits advice or assistance to try and address the resident's long term needs.  Consider whether a referral to other council services is appropriate e.g. children's services, adults services, Work Path etc.  Ensure referrals are made as appropriate.

6.3 Identifying vulnerability and risks – the tables below show examples of how risk and vulnerability might be demonstrated within an application to the Local Welfare Support scheme.

<b>Risk</b>	<b>Vulnerability</b>



<p><b>High Risk</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Children under and of school age</li> <li>○ Pregnancy</li> <li>○ Documented mental health condition</li> <li>○ Documented medical condition or exacerbation of an existing medical condition</li> <li>○ Physical disability</li> <li>○ Documented learning disability</li> <li>○ Domestic violence</li> <li>○ Prevention of entry into institutional care</li> </ul> <p><b>Other Risks</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Significant risk to Tenancy</li> <li>○ Significant or immediate risk to independent living</li> <li>○ Significant risk to Safety</li> <li>○ Significant risk to health</li> <li>○ Significant risk of loss of family stability and cohesion</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Old age</li> <li>○ Physical disability</li> <li>○ Long term limiting health condition</li> <li>○ Responsibility for dependent children or pregnant</li> <li>○ Domestic violence</li> <li>○ Mental Health issue</li> <li>○ Learning Disability</li> <li>○ Single young people establishing themselves including care leavers</li> <li>○ Significant risk of loss of family stability and cohesion</li> <li>○ Significant risk to health</li> <li>○ Significant risk to Safety</li> <li>○ Ex Armed Forces and their families as per the Armed Forces Covenant</li> </ul>
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## 7. Awards and support

7.1 Support will be provided to residents who experience an exceptional event that would represent a potential risk to a person's (or persons in a household) health.

7.2 An exceptional event is something that is unlikely to occur more than once in a 12 month period. On each application for support the Council will review the applicant's circumstances to identify whether further assistance or support can be provided to improve their longer term financial sustainability.

7.3 The normal universal eligibility criteria apply, as will the need to explore whether other sources of support should be first applied for e.g. short term advances, national voluntary assistance, local voluntary assistance, other statutory assistance that the council can provide. Provision from the scheme will always be seen as assistance of last resort.

## 8. Access

8.1 Access to scheme will be via the online application forms, or referral from a trusted partner including other council services (who will complete the online application form on their clients' behalf).

8.2 Statutory services – Adults and Children’s Services, Housing and Homeless Services will identify service users through their existing assessment processes and make referrals. All referrals must meet the universal eligibility criteria for support and for every referral there must be no access to other funds.

8.3 The scheme will operate within office hours. There will be no separate out of hours service for the scheme.

8.4 Trusted Partners – the scheme will continue to develop the Council’s working partnerships with key external organisations. These ‘Trusted Partner’ organisations will be able to make referrals and recommendations on behalf of residents to the scheme on the same basis as internal council services.

8.5 In order to support our trusted partners, the Council will provide clear guidelines on the aims of the scheme and the eligibility criteria. The service will also arrange for provision of training, support and online access arrangements for front line staff.

8.6 Access for residents who are housebound – Residents who are housebound and who are unable to complete an application with a trusted partner or by using the online application forms e.g. due to a disability, will be able to have a home visit.

## **9. Decision outcomes**

9.1 A decision on any application will be made as soon as possible, but within a maximum of two working days.

9.2 Applicants of both successful and unsuccessful applications will be made aware of the outcome of their application. Information will include:

- What has been awarded
- How the award will be made
- The right to request a review of the decision

9.3 Applicants will be asked for an e-mail address and telephone number so that the decision notification can be made as swiftly as possible.

## **10. Review requests**

10.1 An applicant can request a review if they can demonstrate

- There has been a factual error
- A piece of evidence has been overlooked
- They have new evidence to submit

10.2 Review requests must be made within ten working days of the decision being notified. The review will be carried out within five working days by an officer senior to the original decision. The reviewing officer’s decision will be final and there will be no further right to review.

## **11. Help with Housing Costs – Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP's)**

11.1 Where help is required with housing costs an application should be made through the Council's Discretionary Housing Payments scheme. This is predominantly used to allow Local Authorities discretion to top up Housing Benefit awards that fall below the eligible rent in circumstances where the shortfall is likely to cause the recipient hardship.

11.3 There is also provision to pay or contribute towards "rent deposits" and "rent in advance" payments required by HB recipients to access alternative accommodation.

## **12. Additional Support**

12.1 The Resident Support scheme offers an opportunity to develop a system for low income residents that gives them access to services that can improve their long-term circumstances and help to build their financial resilience.

12.2 Each resident who makes an application will be reviewed to see whether they would benefit from further assistance such as being put in contact with another service or agency.

12.3 Where possible this additional support will be undertaken at a face-to-face interview with the resident through the Council, trusted partner or referral agency.

12.4 Types of additional support – the following areas of support will be developed and it is expected that as the scheme matures more support will be provided:

### **Income and benefits –**

- Additional benefits entitlement/benefit check
- Income Maximisation
- Money advice
- Financial capability programmes
- Fuel poverty

### **Education, training and employment opportunities –**

- Intensive, joined up support between Council services and the local Job Centre Plus offices
- Targeting Benefit capped residents to provide help to overcome barriers to work as well as support to those furthest away from the labour market
- Making referrals to Work Path

### **Social well-being and reducing isolation –**

- Support for people who need access to community and social activities,
- Closer working with Age UK and pensioner benefits take up

12.5 **Residents who do not qualify for an award.** Where residents are not eligible for an award, they will be directed to other services, who may be able to provide assistance.

### **13. Fraud and error**

13.1 The Council is committed to the identification and prevention of fraud. Where it is alleged or considered that an application has been made fraudulently, the matter will be investigated. If fraud is found to have occurred, action will be taken including criminal proceedings where relevant.

### **14. Monitoring and review**

14.1 Monitoring of the scheme will allow the Council to make changes where deemed appropriate, to commission additional support where a need is identified and to gather information about who is applying.

14.2 Should it be identified that any particular demographic is making an under proportionate number of claims, further effort will be made to ensure that residents are aware of the scheme.

14.3 Regular feedback will be sought from trusted partners about the performance of the scheme.