

Sheffield Local Assistance Scheme Guidance for Applicants

Place Portfolio – Housing and Neighbourhoods Service

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1 PURPOSE OF DOCUMENT

This document details the guidance that is publicly available to potential customers of the Local Assistance Scheme.

2 LOCAL ASSISTANCE SCHEME GUIDANCE FOR APPLICANTS

2.1 OVERVIEW

What is the Local Assistance Scheme?

The aim of the Local Assistance Scheme is to support independent living and help Sheffield residents in crisis situations with an identified need that cannot be met from another source.

The scheme was set up following the abolition of some parts of the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) Social Fund (Community Care Grants and Crisis Loans). While the Local Assistance Scheme is quite similar to the Social Fund in purpose, it is not the same scheme and has its own policy, rules, and awards.

The Local Assistance Scheme has two types of awards:

1) Sheffield Independence Grants

Sheffield Independence Grants are to support independent living in the community. They can be used to help people establish themselves in the community or to remain there. For example, they may be used to help people setting up home following a period in institutional care, avoid the need to go into care or cope with exceptionally difficult family circumstances. Awards can be made to help provide essential household items and services (including travel costs in particular circumstances).

2) Sheffield Crisis Grants

Sheffield Crisis Grants are intended to help people who do not have enough money to meet their short-term needs arising from a crisis. They are used to prevent serious risk to the health and safety of an individual or their family.

There are no repayments required for Local Assistance Scheme awards.

2.2 SHEFFIELD INDEPENDENCE GRANT

2.2.1 WHO CAN APPLY? (BASIC ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA)

The Council will not approve a Sheffield Independence Grant application unless it is satisfied that you:

- Require assistance for one of the purposes set out in **2.2.2** below
- Have insufficient income to meet your needs
- Are aged 16 years old or over
- Are a Sheffield Resident **and**
- Cannot meet the cost by any other means

We will assess your income against the applicable amounts for benefits awarded by the Department for Work and Pensions to determine whether or not you have sufficient income to meet your basic needs.

We **may** ask you to provide proof of any benefits received and/or bank statements for the **last 3 months** in order for us to consider your application. These can be provided in person, by post or via email. Please see the contact details below.

If you are asked to provide proof of benefits or bank statements and you do not provide these within the processing timescale of your application, it will be rejected.

You can only be awarded one Sheffield Independence Grant in a rolling 12-month period, regardless of any change in circumstances.

Local Assistance Scheme
3rd Floor
Howden House
1 Union Street
Sheffield
S1 2SH

LAS@sheffield.gov.uk

2.2.2 WHAT IS IT FOR?

Sheffield Independence Grants are to support independent living in the community. A Sheffield Independence Grant can help:

- You, a member of your family, someone you look after or someone you will be looking after, to return to the community from care
- You, a member of your family, someone you look after or someone you will be looking after, to return to the community from prison

- You, a member of your family, someone you look after or someone you will be looking after, to stay in the community instead of going into care
- Ease exceptional pressure on individuals and families *(see note below)
- You or your partner look after someone on leave from prison or a young offender's institution on a temporary licence
- You to set up home as part of a planned resettlement programme if you have had an unsettled way of life

It can also be used to help with certain travel expenses in the UK. The journey could be:

- To visit a close friend or family member who is ill
- To attend a relative's funeral
- To visit a child who is being looked after by another parent while awaiting a court decision
- To ease a domestic crisis, or
- To move to suitable accommodation.

*** Note about exceptional pressure on individuals and families:**

All individuals and families on low income face pressures. Exceptional pressure means a situation which causes additional pressure on an individual or family. Examples of this could be a relationship breakdown, having to cope with new health problems, or existing health problems suddenly getting worse.

2.2.3 HOW DOES THE APPLICATION PROCESS WORK?

Applications for Sheffield Independence Grants should be made by filling in our online form. You can do this in one of two ways:

1) Self Service.

You can fill in the form yourself on our website:

<http://www.sheffield.gov.uk/content/sheffield/home/benefits/local-assistance-scheme.html>

The form can be filled in on a computer or mobile device. If you do not have internet access at home, you can use the internet for free at your local library, housing office, or in First Point at Howden House, 1 Union Street, Sheffield S1 2SH.

The online form comes with guidance and examples to help you complete it.

There are also advice services throughout the city who can support you to apply online.

2) Assisted Self Service.

If you have a key worker, they will be able to advise you on the process and help you with your application.

A key worker is someone who is providing you with professional support. Examples of key workers are Social Workers, Tenancy Support Workers, Housing Support Workers, Mental Health Workers, Probation Officers, Drug & Alcohol Support Workers (these are examples only – not an exhaustive list).

If you have no support and are not able to access the internet (for example because you are in hospital), you can request a paper form by calling 0114 27 34567.

2.2.4 WHAT WILL AWARDS BE MADE FOR?

Sheffield Independence Grants are generally awarded for household items such as white goods (for example fridges, ovens and washing machines), essential cooking equipment, seating, carpets, curtains, beds, and bedding.

Under some circumstances, a Sheffield Independence Grant could also be awarded to help with:

- Repair of household items
- Removal and Storage Expenses including reconnection of moved appliances
- Improvement to living conditions (re-decoration or minor repairs)
- Utility connection charges / installation of pre-payment meters
- Travel expenses to hospital for appointments
- Certain other travel expenses (including an overnight stay if this is essential) as described in the “What is it for?” section (above)
- Clothing

We will not pay for items provided in furnished tenancies by your landlord. If you are a tenant, your landlord is responsible for repairs and maintenance of items they have provided. Please check with them and your tenancy agreement first as we will not be able to pay for items your landlord is responsible for.

If you are a council tenant, you can contact the Council Housing Service on 0114 293 0000 or visit <http://www.sheffield.gov.uk/>

If you are unsure about your rights as a tenant, you can contact Private Housing Standards on 0114 2734680 or visit:

[http://www.sheffield.gov.uk/content/sheffield/home/housing/tenancy-law-rights-advice-
fortenants.html](http://www.sheffield.gov.uk/content/sheffield/home/housing/tenancy-law-rights-advice-fortenants.html)

2.2.5 WHAT WILL AWARDS NOT BE MADE FOR?

- The cost of buying, renting, or installing a telephone or any call charges
- The cost of fuel consumption and any associated standing charges (gas or electricity bills)
- Council tax, water charges or arrears
- Any housing costs, including repairs or improvements to your home (unless very minor), deposits to secure accommodation, rent, mortgage payments, service costs and all

other charges for accommodation (whether or not that charge includes payment for meals and/or services)

- Any item or service which the Local Authority has a statutory duty to provide
- Maternity or Funeral expenses
- Rent in advance for people leaving care
- Daily living expenses such as food and groceries unless these are additional expenses because you or your partner are looking after a prisoner or young offender on temporary licence

This list is not exhaustive.

2.2.6 HOW LONG DOES IT TAKE TO GET A DECISION?

A decision will be made about your Sheffield Independence Grant within fifteen working days of us receiving a fully completed application.

A decision notice will be sent to you within two working days of the decision.

2.2.7 HOW IS THE DECISION MADE?

A council officer will look at all the information on your application before deciding if we can make an award.

There is only a limited budget available for grant awards so we cannot make an award in every case or for all items you want help to pay for.

The information you provide will help us decide:

- Whether you meet the eligibility criteria
- Whether your financial circumstances merit the provision of assistance

When deciding whether to award a Sheffield Independence Grant, we need to take into account how much is left in the Scheme budget.

Where a Sheffield Independence Grant is issued, it will be awarded to help you meet identified needs that reflect the aims of the Scheme (as explained in the “What is it for?” section of this guide).

We will take into account any savings you have in deciding what items you will be awarded.

The council officer may contact other people who have been working with you (for example a social worker or tenancy support worker) to help them make the right decision. You will be asked to give permission for them to do this in your application. If you do not give this permission in your application (a tick box at the end of the application form) your application will be automatically rejected.

2.2.8 HOW WILL I BE NOTIFIED OF THE DECISION?

If you have provided us with an email address, written confirmation of the decision will be sent to you by email. If you do not have an email address, the decision notice will be sent to your home address by second class post.

2.2.9 WHAT IF I DISAGREE WITH THE DECISION?

If you are unhappy with the outcome of your application, you may request a review of the decision. Review requests should be submitted in writing by post or email within one calendar month of the date on the decision notice to:

FAO Local Assistance Scheme
3rd Floor
Howden House
1 Union Street
Sheffield
S1 2SH

LAS@sheffield.gov.uk

2.2.10 HOW WILL I GET MY SHEFFIELD INDEPENDENCE GRANT?

Household goods will be delivered through the Furnished Accommodation team within the Council.

Please note that the Furnished Accommodation team are not responsible for the maintenance or repair of any items delivered on behalf of the Local Assistance Scheme.

Travel awards will be issued as advance tickets for buses and trams through the Cashiers service in Howden House or arrangements will be made by the back-office team for trains and taxis. Awards for removals will be paid by bank transfer (BACS) directly to the removal company.

Clothing will be issued as supermarket vouchers.

2.2.11 FRAUD

The Council, to ensure that limited resources are most effectively used to meet need, is committed to taking action against fraudulent claims for assistance. Where the Council is satisfied that the Applicant has made a fraudulent claim, for example by falsely declaring their circumstances, providing a false statement or evidence in support of their application, it will take appropriate action, including prosecution.

2.3 SHEFFIELD CRISIS GRANT

2.3.1 WHO CAN APPLY? (BASIC ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA)

The Council will not approve a Sheffield Crisis Grant application unless it is satisfied that you:

- Require assistance for one of the purposes set out in [2.3.2](#) below
- Have insufficient income to meet your needs
- Are aged 16 years old or over
- Are a Sheffield Resident **and**
- You need help because of an emergency or disaster **and**
- The health and safety of you or a member of your family will be at serious risk if you do not get any help.

We will assess your income against the applicable amounts for benefits awarded by the Department for Work and Pensions to determine whether or not you have sufficient income to meet your basic needs.

We **may** ask you to provide proof of any benefits received and/or bank statements for the **last 3 months** in order for us to consider your application. These can be provided in person, by post or via email. Please see the contact details below.

If you are asked to provide proof of benefits or bank statements and you do not provide these within the processing timescale of your application, it will be rejected.

You can only be awarded two Sheffield Crisis Grants in a rolling 12-month period, regardless of any change in circumstances.

Local Assistance Scheme
3rd Floor
Howden House
1 Union Street
Sheffield
S1 2SH

LAS@sheffield.gov.uk

2.3.2 WHAT IS IT FOR?

Sheffield Crisis Grants are to help people who do not have enough money to meet their short-term needs because of an emergency or disaster. They are used to prevent serious risk to the health and safety of an individual or a family member residing with them.

An emergency means an unforeseen event or situation resulting in needs that must be met urgently (for example, theft).

A disaster is an event of sudden and great misfortune (for example, a major fire, flood, or gas explosion). Less serious situations such as a small fire in one room or a leak from a washing machine do not qualify as a disaster.

2.3.3 HOW DOES THE APPLICATION PROCESS WORK?

Applications for Sheffield Crisis Grants can be made by filling in our online form:

<http://www.sheffield.gov.uk/content/sheffield/home/benefits/local-assistance-scheme.html>

The form can be filled in on a computer or mobile device. If you apply online, you will be able to save your application and return to it later if you are missing any information.

If you do not have internet access at home, you can use the internet for free at your local library or in First Point at Howden House.

The online form comes with guidance and examples to help you complete it.

If you are unable to complete an online application, you can also apply for a Sheffield Crisis Grant by calling the Contact Centre. An advisor will assist you to make your application by telephone. Please note that this can take up to 30 minutes to complete and you will need to have the necessary information with you e.g. National Insurance Number, income, and expenditure details. You can also call this number for help if you find it hard to complete the form yourself.

You will need to have certain information to hand to complete the application. This includes:

- Your personal details including name, address, phone number, email address and date of birth.
- Your National Insurance Number
- Personal details of your partner (if you have one) including Date of Birth and National Insurance Number.
- Details of any other adults in your household including date of birth.
- Details of dependent children including names and dates of birth.
- Crime reference number if your emergency was caused by a crime. □ Details of your regular financial income and outgoings.

You will be asked to explain what has happened to cause your emergency or disaster and to provide details of your financial situation. Some of the information you provide (for example the benefits you receive) will be checked before a decision can be made.

If you are applying by telephone, you will need to make sure you have this information ready before you make the call.

If you apply online, you will be able to save your application and return to it later if you are missing any information.

2.3.4 WHAT WILL AWARDS BE MADE FOR?

Sheffield Crisis Grants are generally awarded to cover day to day living expenses (food, groceries, nappies, pay as you go fuel meters).

In some situations, a Sheffield Crisis Grant could also be used to help with accommodation costs (e.g. rent in advance for privately rented properties) but only if our calculations show that the property you intend to rent is affordable based on your declared income and/or any support you receive with housing costs, or travel expenses (e.g. access to hospital) if there is no other way to prevent a serious health and safety risk to you or your family.

In the event of a disaster, a Sheffield Crisis Grant could be used to help with items or services other than day to day living expenses (for example clothing, household items or travel expenses to enable you to return home if you are stranded outside Sheffield as the result of a disaster).

2.3.5 WHAT WILL AWARDS NOT BE MADE FOR?

It is not intended that a Sheffield Crisis Grant will be awarded to help with any of the following expenses:

- Any need which occurs outside the United Kingdom
- An educational or training need including clothing and tools
- Distinctive school uniform or sports clothes or equipment of any description to be used at school
- Travel expenses to or from school
- School meals
- Expenses in connection with court (legal) proceedings such as legal fees, fines, court fees, costs, damages, subsistence or travelling expenses
- Removal or storage charges
- Domestic assistance and respite care
- Repair to property
- A medical, surgical, optical, aural, or dental item or service
- Work related expenses
- Debts
- Investments
- Maternity and Funeral Expenses
- Accommodation charges including meals and services. If an application is made for payment in advance to secure accommodation and the accommodation charge includes meals and / or services then the award will be made to cover the accommodation charge only

This list is not exhaustive.

2.3.6 HOW LONG DOES IT TAKE TO GET A DECISION?

A decision will be made about your Sheffield Crisis Grant within two working days of receiving a fully completed application. In some cases, we will be able to do this more quickly, depending on how complex your situation is.

2.3.7 HOW IS THE DECISION MADE?

A council officer will look at all the information on your application before deciding if we can make an award. You may be awarded less than the amount you have asked for.

There is only a limited budget available for grant awards so we cannot make an award in every case. The decision maker has to meet priority needs first.

2.3.8 HOW WILL I BE NOTIFIED OF THE DECISION?

Depending on your circumstances, you will be notified of an award by telephone or email.

If we are not able to award you a Sheffield Crisis Grant you will receive written notification of this. If you have provided us with an email address, the decision notice will be sent to you by email. If you do not have an email address, the decision notice will be sent to your home address by second class post.

2.3.9 WHAT IF I DISAGREE WITH THE DECISION?

If you are unhappy with the outcome of your application, you may request a review of the decision. Review decisions are final and there is no further right to review. Review requests should be submitted in writing by post or email within one calendar month of the date on the decision notice to:

FAO Local Assistance Scheme
3rd Floor
Howden House
1 Union Street
Sheffield
S1 2SH

LAS@sheffield.gov.uk

2.3.10 HOW WILL I GET MY SHEFFIELD CRISIS GRANT?

Sheffield Crisis Grants will be administered by the Cashiers service based in Howden House, either as a cash payment for pre-payment meters or by vouchers for food, housekeeping and clothing, or advance tickets when an award is made for Travel on buses or trams. You will be advised of the payment process and required identification documents by the advisor or officer who has processed your application.

- **Rent in Advance** will be made directly to the landlord or letting agent via BACS transfer.

- **Household goods** awarded in Disaster situations, will be delivered through the Furnished Accommodation team within the Council.

Please note that the Furnished Accommodation team are not responsible for the maintenance or repair of any items delivered on behalf of the Local Assistance Scheme.

2.3.11 FRAUD

The Council, to ensure that limited resources are most effectively used to meet need, is committed to taking action against fraudulent claims for assistance. Where the Council is satisfied that the Applicant has made a fraudulent claim, for example by falsely declaring their circumstances, providing a false statement or evidence in support of their application, it will take appropriate action, including prosecution.