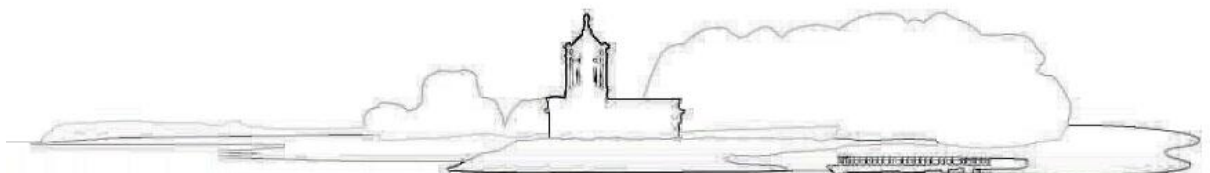


Rutland County Council

DISCRETIONARY CRISIS SUPPORT FUND POLICY

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Summary of document

The Policy details how the Crisis Support Fund will operate, who is eligible to apply, the process for making applications, the potential amounts awarded and details of the appeal process.

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1.0 INTRODUCTION AND OBJECTIVES

- 1.1 From 1st April 2013 Community Care Grants and Crisis Loans that were administered and paid by the Department of Work and Pensions will no longer be available. This function has been transferred to Local Authorities as part of welfare reform. The expectation is that Local Authorities will not adopt the same model but use new and inventive ways of delivering crisis support to their community.
- 1.2 The Government will not prescribe how the funding should be used and therefore each authority must decide how best to support those in need in their local community, using local knowledge and experience.
- 1.3 The Government has not imposed a new duty upon authorities to provide any new assistance, therefore any financial or other support will be awarded in accordance with local strategic aims and objectives.
- 1.4 Relevant strategic aims and objectives are as follows:
 - Meeting the health and well being needs of the community
 - Delivering Council Services within our Medium Term Financial Plan

2.0 THE PURPOSE OF CRISIS SUPPORT AND ELIGIBILITY

- 2.1 Crisis support is intended to provide financial support to meet or help to meet a need that unless provided would severely disadvantage the applicant or a member of their household.
- 2.2 Crisis support can also provide emergency financial support where the applicant or a member of their household would suffer severe disadvantage if their immediate needs are not met.
- 2.3 The following people will be eligible to apply:
 - Income Support
 - Job Seekers Allowance
 - Pension Credit
 - Employment and Support Allowance
 - Universal Credit
 - Households on a low income that would suffer severely health and/or safety problems if remedial support were not provided

3.0 THE PURPOSE OF COMMUNITY CARE GRANTS AND ELIGIBILITY

- 3.1 Community Care Grants (CCG) are designed to help people to remain in or to establish themselves in the community.
- 3.2 The following groups will be eligible to apply, however each application will be considered on its own merits:
- People who are setting up home as part of a resettlement programme
 - People moving out of residential or institutional care
 - People who have been discharged from NHS establishments
 - People who have been discharged from prison or a youth centre
 - Young people leaving Local Authority care
 - People who are moving to live closer to relatives who will be providing support
 - People who were homeless within the community and are setting up home for the first time
 - Households that are suffering from exceptional pressure
 - Households that would suffer severely health and/or safety problems if remedial support were not provided

4.0 PRIORITY FOR AWARDS- CRISIS SUPPORT

- 4.1 The nature, extent and urgency of the need will be considered. Applications will fit into 2 categories:
- High Priority - Crisis Support would have an immediate and substantial impact upon the applicants circumstances and would resolve the situation completely
 - Low Priority – Crisis Support would have a noticeable or minor effect in resolving the applicants circumstances and would go some way or fall short of resolving the situation
- 4.2 High priority needs will be considered first, followed by low priority needs.
- 4.3 Examples of priorities are detailed in the table below:

High	Mrs West is a lone parent with two children aged 3 and 5. Mrs West checked her bank account and her regular payment of income support has not been paid through an error made by DWP. It is Friday morning and Mrs West needs money to buy food until Monday morning, when the DWP have assured
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	<p>her that the income support payment will be in her account.</p> <p>Mrs West is awarded £25.00 voucher for a local supermarket as her family would suffer severe hardship if the support where not provided. The crisis was resolved completely.</p>
Low	<p>Mr Moran's car has suddenly broken down and he needs to attend an interview in two days time. Mr Moran has asked for £20 money for transport to and from the interview.</p> <p>Mr Moran's claim was refused. Mr Moran was advised of various options available to him including: contact the interviewer to rearrange the interview seek reimbursement of travel costs from the interview walk or cycle to the interview ask a friend or voluntary organisation for transport assistance</p>

4.4 Failure to comply with previous advice or recommendations would be detrimental to any future award i.e. to seek budgeting advice from CAB.

5.0 PRIORITY FOR AWARDS – COMMUNITY CARE GRANTS

5.1 The nature, extent and urgency of the need will be considered. Applications will fit into 2 categories:

- High Priority – a grant would have an immediate and substantial impact upon the applicants circumstances and would resolve the situation completely
- Low Priority – Crisis Support would have some or a minor effect in resolving the applicants circumstances and would fall short of fully resolving the situation

5.2 High priority needs will be considered first, followed by low priority needs. It is highly likely that the Council will refer some high priority and all low priority needs to partner organisations as detailed below.

5.3 Examples of priorities are detailed in the table below:

High	Gill is a 55 year old carer/mum with a severely disabled son; David, who lives at their home in Langham, he required 24/7 care and Gill's husband
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	<p>works full time in a low paid job. David regularly soils the bed and Gill needs to buy a new mattress and bedding.</p> <p>Gill was awarded a new mattress, bedding and protective coverings. The goods were provided by Voluntary Action Rutland.</p>
Low	<p>Mr Robinson is a single man living in rented accommodation in Oakham, he is in part-time work. Mr Robinson would like a new washing machine as his old one is broken and he makes a weekly trip to the local launderette.</p> <p>Mr Robinsons claim was refused. He has ample time and income to afford a weekly or fortnightly laundrette wash. He also has the opportunity to seek full time work.</p> <p>Mr Robinson was advised to seek advice from Citizens Advice Bureau regarding money advice and to consider applying to join Clockwise Credit union.</p>

6.0 ASSISTANCE THAT CAN BE PROVIDED

6.1 Support can be provided are detailed as follows:

Crisis Support	Community Care Grant
Cash limited to up to £40.00 per crisis	Essential items when setting up a new home
food bank vouchers	Clothing and footwear
other vouchers i.e. for a supermarket limited to £40.00	Bedding
	Crockery
	Travel expenses when moving home
	Rent in advance if not met from another fund
	Removal expenses
	Domestic appliances
	Repairs to essential items
	Other reasonable related to severe and critical financial circumstances; this can include state benefits not being paid into their bank account when expected causing severe financial hardship.

6.2 The list is not exhaustive but consideration should be given to providing the most appropriate support and that which will have the most impact.

- 6.3 In some circumstances 'nearly new' items could be offered / provided instead of newly purchased items. This approach may ensure that the support offered is maximised and also supports the Council's aim to create a sustained environment.
- 6.4 The Council may refer the applicant to a partner organisation if it is appropriate to do so. The organisation may assist with procurement of the item or provide the item/s. The following organisations are included:
- Voluntary Action Rutland
 - Leicestershire Charity Link
 - Melton Furniture Project
 - The Rutland Dispensary Trust
 - North Luffenham Village Trust
 - Rutland Community Spirit
 - The Family Fund
 - Clockwise Credit Union
- 6.5 Transport or travel costs generally will not be met. But there may be circumstances where the need to travel is a crisis. Each case will be considered on its own merits.
- 6.6 In some circumstances the award will be required to be repaid, an invoice will be issued to facilitate this. E.g. benefit delays.

7.0 THE APPLICATION PROCESS-HOW TO APPLY

- 7.1 Applications must be made using an application form as specified or online.
- 7.2 Applications will only be accepted from people living in Rutland and registered to pay Council Tax or detailed as a member of that household as a resident.
- 7.3 Applications may be made to Rutland Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB), or directly to Rutland County Council. The application must be fully completed and any evidence requested must be provided to support the application.
- 7.4 Applications can be completed by a person acting on behalf of the applicant, providing the applicant has given their consent in writing.
- 7.5 Failure to complete the form fully may result in an unsuccessful application by default. The amount being applied for must be specified or, if the items required are goods, those items must be specified.
- 7.6 A senior Officer within the Revenues & Benefits Team will assess the application, and in some cases the officer may request further

information. I.e. a mini statement detailing the latest banking transactions.

- 7.7 If the applicant is in receipt of other Council assessed benefits, this data may also be used to validate the application. Data may be shared with other departments within the council, such as housing options team. All data will be processed in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998.
- 7.8 It may be appropriate for an Officer to make a home visit; this may be to assist the applicant in completing the form or to obtain supporting evidence. All visits will be made by agreement with the applicant; no unannounced visits will be made by Officers.

8.0 EVIDENCE

- 8.1 In some circumstances the information provided on the application form may be sufficient to make an assessment. Further investigation may be necessary to support the application, some examples are given:

- Information from a third party i.e. Social Worker
- Estimated cost of repair
- Estimated cost of replacement
- Information from a professional source i.e. Probation Officer, Housing Options team, Citizens Advice Bureau
- Income, capital, savings, cash in hand
- Loans, investments, bank statements
- Explore steps taken to avoid the situation
- Evidence of being a victim of crime

9.0 TREATMENT OF CAPITAL

- 9.1 Any capital held by the applicant or their partner will be taken into account.

- 9.2 Evidence may be requested to support the claim and validate sums held.

- 9.3 The main types of capital are:

- Current accounts
- Savings accounts
- National savings certificates
- Fixed term investments
- Life insurance or endowment policies
- Trust funds
- Property other than the applicants home

- 9.4 This list is not exhaustive and applicants are expected to declare any form of capital they hold to enable an Officer to determine if the capital should be taken into account.
- 9.5 Income from dependent children will not be taken into account.

10.0 NOTIFICATION OF THE DECISION

- 10.1 Decisions will be communicated to the applicant within:

Crisis support	3 hours
Community Care Grants	2 weeks

It may not always be possible to make a decision within these timescales; however every effort will be made to meet these targets.

- 10.2 Applications received 3 hours before the Council's advertised closing hours, may not be decided until the next working day.
- 10.3 The decision notice will include:
- The reason for the award
 - The intended use of the award
 - The amount of the award
 - Appeal process if applicable
 - Signposting to other services/support

11.0 HOW A DECISION IS MADE

- 11.1 Officers will make a decision based on the information provided in the application form and any other information available to them i.e. Housing Benefit claim data, information from a Social Worker, police incident report.
- 11.2 The Officer will take into account all of the circumstances and reasons that led to an application being made, failure to fully complete the form or providing incorrect information will be detrimental to the applicant.
- 11.3 The Officer will consider and explore but not limited to the following:
- the applicants and partners income
 - outgoings
 - debts
 - capital held
 - access to other sources of support
 - the circumstances and reason for the claim
 - preventative measures taken by the applicant or partner

- the priority category of the application
- the likely impact if the support were given
- the likely impact if support were not given
- balance of probability i.e. in the case of repeated theft of state benefits
- the amount of the award requested
- the Council's budgetary position

12.0 DECISION MAKERS DISCRETION

- 12.1 The Policy should provide a framework for decision makers to determine if an award is appropriate, however it is recognise that every situation cannot be documented in this policy. In this case the Officer should use discretion based on the facts presented to them.
- 12.2 The Officer will have regard to the level of the support being requested therefore the following will be considered:
- Is the amount being requested sufficient enough?
 - Is the amount being requested too much?
 - Will the support fulfil the need?
 - What other means of support are available or could be considered first?
 - Is the application outside the scope of what can be provided?
 - The period for which the crisis is likely to continue

13 THE AMOUNT AND METHOD OF THE AWARD

- 13.1 The applicant should detail the amount of support that is required. However Officers will determine the amount of support based on local economic factors and arrangements in place with other agencies/retailers.
- 13.2 Generally, cash payments will not be made, however it is recognised that in certain circumstances a cash payment may be the only option available, all other alternative will be explored before a cash payment is made
- 13.3 Cash payments will not be made if the person has a known addiction to illegal substances, alcohol or cigarettes, or if the Officer suspects that the applicant may use the cash for another purpose than indentified.
- 13.4 The amount will be the minimum required to provide the support requested and may be reduced as the Officer deems appropriate. If this is the case then the Decision Notice will record this.

13.5 In most instances a successful award will be made by various methods, the Officer will deem the most appropriate:

- A voucher for use at an approved retailer or charity or agency
- A voucher to obtain food from a food bank
- Referral to a trust or other organisation
- Referral to a credit union
- Referral to an advice agency
- Referral to a furniture project
- Cash payment
- Arrange directly with a supplier to procure the item required

14 WHAT CRISIS SUPPORT DOES NOT COVER

14.1 The following are excluded from crisis support:

- Maternity expenses
- Funeral expenses
- Cold weather payments
- Winter fuel payments
- Expenses for which the Council has a duty to meet
- Housing costs, repairs or improvements
- Daily living expenses to supplement usual income
- Medicine or support available from the NHS
- Carpets, curtains and soft furnishings
- Ornaments
- Travel or transport costs
- Where other sources of funding are available e.g. support may be available from 'welfare to work' providers for those eligible.

14.2 Some other exclusions may apply to Crisis Support; these may be determined by the type of service and the circumstances. Officers will use their discretion when determining these.

14.3 Certain individuals are excluded from Discretionary Crisis Support, these are detailed below:

- Care home residents and hospital in-patients
 - Persons who are fully maintained by a religious order
 - Those in education and are in receipt of a student loan
 - Students who are not in receipt of Income Support
- Persons from abroad who do not meet the Habitual Residency Test

14.4 The above list does not fully detail the criteria, the Officer determining the application will establish if an individual falls into any of the above categories.

15 CIRCUMSTANCES IN WHICH REPEAT APPLICATIONS ARE NOT PERMITTED

- 15.1 Discretionary Crisis Support is intended to help individuals and families to cope with extreme and severe difficult one-off situations. It is not intended to be a regular form of support.
- 15.2 Individuals and families are expected to manage their day to day finances and to take steps to budget and manage their household income. Guidance and support is available to help to achieve this.
- 15.3 Repeat applications will not be accepted within a 12 month period for :
- The same set of circumstances or repeated claims.
 - Where advice has been ignored or not sought as instructed
 - Where the applicant has previously applied and was unsuccessful
 - Where the applicant has not taken steps to remedy their circumstances
 - Where the applicant has not co-operated with the Council or other public bodies i.e. Job Centre Plus
 - In the case of the supply of furniture or white goods, where the goods supplied have been misused or sold.
- 15.4 The maximum number of applications that will be considered within a 12 month period is limited to 3 per household. Any more than 3 applications will result in the applicant being automatically referred to other agencies for support.
- 15.5 A further application made within 14 days of the first will be considered as a loan, meaning that the application will be expected to pay back any subsequent award. Failure to pay back the loan will automatically result in a refusal for any subsequent applications. The applicant will also be advised to seek advice and support to address any issues.

16.0 CONSIDERATION OF BUDGETARY POSITION

- 16.1 The Council has limited funding for the Discretionary Crisis Support fund; as such the Council's budgetary position may be taken into account when considering applications.
- 16.2 High Priority need applications will be considered and met first throughout the whole of the allocation period. The allocation period is from 1st April to 31st March annually.
- 16.3 If there is heavy demand on the Discretionary Crisis Support fund, only High Priority cases will be considered.

- 16.4 The priority of an application is determined by the particular circumstances, the budgetary position is not a factor in determining the priority level.
- 16.5 The budgetary position will be monitored monthly, trends of spend will be monitored to assist with forecasting.
- 16.6 The Revenues & Benefits Manager will notify Senior Officers, relevant Managers and third sector agencies if the budget forecast is adverse and advise if only high priority cases are to be considered.
- 16.7 Officers must seek management approval from the Assistant Director (Finance) if the crisis support award is above £1,000.

17.0 OUT OF HOURS PROVISION

- 17.1 Majority of applications will be processed within normal office hours; however it is acknowledged that severe and serious crisis can occur during the evenings, weekends and public holidays.
- 17.2 The Council will not provide an out of hour's service, however if there is a serious risk to the health or welfare of the applicant or their immediate family, the applicant can contact the Emergency Duty Team on 0116 255 1606.

18.0 INTERACTION WITH SANCTIONS

- 18.1 The Applicant must declare if they are subject to any sanctions imposed by Job Centre Plus or other agency. Sanctions will not mean that an award will not be made, but the Officer will want to understand the nature and the cause of the sanction, prior to making a decision.
- 18.2 If the applicant has sanctions the Officer will consider whether a Discretionary Crisis Support fund will undermine the sanction when making a decision. The Officer may impose conditions with any award to reinforce the sanction.
- 18.3 If an application is made due to a benefits sanction no second application will be considered within a 12 month period for the same reason.

19.0 REPAYMENT

- 19.1 Officers will determine if the sum awarded is repayable. Consideration will be given to the duration of the award and the repayment terms to ensure they are affordable to the applicant.

19.2 If it is discovered at a later date that the claim is fraudulent or the award was not used as intended, the amount will be repayable by default.

19.3 Where repayment is required an invoice will be issued.

20.0 FRAUDULENT CLAIMS

20.1 Applications will be deemed to be made in good faith and based on the facts presented. If the applicant omits or forgets information and remembers this at a later date, this should be communicated as soon as possible.

20.2 Officers will assess the validity and the legitimacy of the application. The Officer may pose questions or seek evidence to establish the facts before making a decision.

20.3 Failure to disclose a material fact or to make a false application will be treated as making a fraudulent application.

20.4 The Council has a 'no tolerance' stance to fraud and will take appropriate steps to prevent and detect fraud.

20.5 The Council may seek to prosecute applicants where there is sufficient evidence to support this action and it is appropriate given the nature and type of offence.

20.6 The Council may request receipts or other forms of evidence to establish that the award has been spent on the crisis.

21.0 ALTERNATIVE SOURCES OF FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE – COUNCIL

21.1 The Discretionary Crisis Support fund is one source of funding available to applicants. Other sources of support are available and may be more appropriate. A flow chart will assist Officers and agencies in determining which source of assistance is the most appropriate.

21.2 Other sources of support are detailed as :

- Discretionary Housing Payments
- Section 13A Council Tax Discounts
- Section 17 Children's Act 1989 payments
- Homelessness deposit scheme
- Travel Aid Scheme
- Fuel assistance Schemes

- 21.3 Officers will consider the alternatives available, particularly if Discretionary Crisis Support is refused. It may not be necessary for the applicant to complete a new application form.

22.0 ALTERNATIVE SOURCES OF FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE – EXTERNAL

- 22.1 The Council works closely with other agencies and will signpost applicants to other sources of support if appropriate, including welfare to work providers, Leicester Charity Link and foodbank. This will be particularly important if Discretionary Crisis Support is refused.
- 22.2 The Council will provide a leaflet with contact details and the type of support available within Rutland and nationally. 22.3 The leaflet will be reviewed and updated regularly.

23.0 REFERRAL FROM OTHER SECTORS

- 23.1 Officers within the Council are able to fast track applications by providing referrals with supporting evidence or statements. It is recognised that Social Workers will have sufficient knowledge of the applicant's circumstances to validate the claim without the need further evidence.
- 23.2 Referrals can also be made via the third sector and via partner organisations. Applications will be accepted that have been completed on behalf of the applicant. Supporting evidence may be requested. The Officer will accept that the referrer has asked relevant questions to establish validity.

24.0 DEBT ADVICE

- 24.1 Individuals that experience or need financial support often have debts or are not adept at managing their finances. During the process of application, debt may be identified as a cause of or contributing to the crisis and the cause of the application. As part of the process Officers will determine if the applicant would benefit from seeking independent financial advice.
- 24.2 If the Officer believed that financial advice may be needed, the Officer may make this a condition of the award. The Officer will provide the applicant with contact details of the relevant organisation. Evidence may need to be provided that the advice has been sought.

- 24.3 This measure is not designed to be punitive but to encourage the applicant to manage their finances independently and to budget for future planned or unplanned financial pressures.

25.0 APPEALS AND COMPLAINTS

- 25.1 Discretionary Crisis Support will be determined by a Senior Officer within the timeframes detailed. Not all applications will be awarded for the amount of support requested or may be refused outright. The Decision Notice will detail the reason for the decision. Applicants wishing to appeal must state the grounds for the appeal and provide further evidence to support their appeal.
- 25.2 Appeals must be made in writing and will be reviewed by a senior member of staff within the Revenues & Benefits Team. Appeals will be reviewed within 3 working days and the decision communicated to the applicant in writing.
- 25.3 If the applicant is aggrieved by the decision then the Council's usual complaints process is available to them.

26.0 DATA PROTECTION

- 26.1 Data processed by the Council relating to Discretionary Crisis Support fund will be dealt with in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998.
- 26.2 In order to expedite applications, the Council may access other sources of data to validate the application i.e. Housing Benefit data. The applicant will be asked to sign a declaration to allow this sharing of information.
- 26.3 Data contained on the Discretionary Crisis Support application form may be used to prevent and detect fraud in accordance with the National Fraud Initiative. A disclaimer will be detailed on the application form to explain this.

27.0 REVIEW AND CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

- 27.1 This policy will be reviewed annually.
- 27.2 The policy will be published and available to view on the Council's website.
- 27.3 The Council is dedicated to continuous improvement, where and when practicable, improvements will be made operationally to ensure the Discretionary Crisis Support works effectively and to ensure that

funding is correctly awarded to those who have the greatest need and will benefit the most.

28.0 MONITORING AND REPORTING ARRANGEMENTS

28.1 Applications, awards and refusals will be monitored to ensure that the Council's aims and objectives are met and will be used to shape the future use of the Discretionary Crisis Support fund.

28.2 Reports will record the following:

- The name of the claimant
- The address of the applicant
- The age of the claimant and their household
- Ward/Parish of the applicant
- The date of the award
- The priority level of the award
- The amount of the award
- The reason for the award/refusal
- Indicate if the award is repayable

Reports will be run on a monthly basis and used to forecast future demand and to monitor trends i.e. seasonal.

28.3 A review form may be sent to applicants whose application was refused to obtain information to see how the applicant was able to cope with the crisis without funding. This information may be used to shape the future use of the Discretionary Crisis Support fund.

28.4 Information may be collected to monitor equality and diversity, to ensure that the Policy does not disadvantage any particular group or individual disproportionately.

A large print version of this document is available on request



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