

Durham County Council
Welfare Assistance Scheme Policy
2021/22

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Introduction and aims of the Welfare Assistance Scheme

The Welfare Assistance Scheme is designed to assist the most vulnerable in meeting their immediate short-term needs or maintaining their independence in the community in accordance with Durham County Council's equality and child poverty duties.

The main features of the scheme are that:

- The scheme is operated at the Council's discretion
- There is no statutory right to a Welfare Assistance Scheme award
- The amount of Welfare Assistance Scheme awards in any given year will be limited by the budget set for each individual scheme

There are two elements to the Welfare Assistance Scheme:

- Daily Living Expenses which aims to help meet an applicant's immediate short term needs for goods or services that arise because of a disaster or unforeseen circumstances. In particular, if the inability to afford the goods/services will result in a deterioration of the health or well-being of the applicant or a member of their household. This includes direct payments to utilities and prepayment card/voucher for food and travel.
- Settlement Grant which aims to help applicants remain in the community or move back into the community after a period in supported or unsettled accommodation. This will be achieved by providing access to a range of standard items such as beds, bedding, furniture and white goods.

The above awards are discretionary and will be awarded to applicants whose circumstances meet the criteria outlined in this policy. All applications will be assessed in line with the qualifying conditions in this policy and be subject to the amount of grant available at the time of application.

Links to Durham County Council priorities

The Policy links to and underpins the outcomes set out in the Vision for County Durham and Council Plan Vision.

The vision for County Durham was written together with partner organisations and the public and sets out what we would like the county to look like in 15 years' time. It was approved by Council and launched by the County Durham Partnership in October 2019.

Both the vision for County Durham and the Council Plan are structured around three ambitions which are: -

- More and better jobs
- People living long and independent lives
- Communities are well connected and supportive of each other

An additional ambition of an excellent council has been developed for the Council Plan to capture the corporate initiatives that the council has identified and that it wants to undertake to transform its operations and enable achievement of the ambitions within the vision.

The Council Plan is structured around these four ambitions and it sets out under each ambition our achievements and issues to address together with key programmes of work the council plans to undertake. Progress against the Plan is monitored through quarterly update reports

of progress against our work programme and performance against key indicators to Cabinet and the relevant overview and scrutiny committees.

As a public authority, Durham County Council is also required by law to set out equality objectives and review these on a triennial basis. Our new equality objectives are also set out within the Council Plan and the Plan also details how these are integrated into our ambitions.

Daily Living Expenses (DLE)

An applicant must be resident in County Durham, must be able to show evidence of hardship and meet the qualifying conditions set out below:

There will be two stages to the assessment of a DLE application:

- 1) An assessment of need - to establish if the applicant meets all of the qualifying conditions set out below.
- 2) A financial assessment - to establish if the applicant has immediate access to any other form of financial assistance or funding.

Qualifying conditions

To qualify for a DLE Grant, the applicant must:

- meet one of the qualifying conditions defined in paragraph 1 or paragraph 2;
 - and
 - meet the conditions defined in paragraphs 3 and 4.
- 1) As a direct result of the inability to afford the goods or services requested, either the health or well-being of the applicant or a member of their household will immediately deteriorate. In addition, the applicant or a member of their household who lives with them should also meet at least one of the following:
 - a) Have a serious physical health problem for which treatment is being received
 - b) Have a dependent child who normally lives with them and that child is at immediate risk
 - c) Have a substance or alcohol misuse problem, for which treatment or support is being received
 - d) Are on probation or receiving support relating to previous offences
 - e) Are affected by, or at risk of domestic abuse or hate crime
 - f) Have a learning disability
 - g) Have a physical or sensory impairment
 - h) Have a mental health problem, for which treatment or support is being received
 - i) Are an older person (over 60) with support needs
 - j) Are pregnant
 - k) There is a serious risk to the health and safety of the applicant; or

- 2) Exceptional circumstances - An immediate need for items and services has arisen following the occurrence of an exceptional event or unforeseen circumstances. This may include: -
 - a) sudden misfortune involving the destruction or loss of property or possessions
 - b) the death of a family member
 - c) not receiving any monies from DWP (sanction, disallowance or waiting for first payment of Universal Credit)
- 3) The applicant has no other form of immediate financial assistance, for example family, friends, employer, own resources or other available funding streams.
- 4) The applicant must be aged 16 years of age or over.

Any award of DLE will be limited to a maximum of 1 calendar month. The qualifying conditions for a DLE, as outlined in this policy, must be met.

DLE Budget

Please note that even if the applicant meets the above conditions an award will not always be given. Consideration will also be given to the balance available in the DLE Grant budget. In doing this, the priority of each case will be compared to other applications. There is a duty not to overspend the annual budget and consideration will be given to each application on its individual merits.

What is covered by Daily Living Expenses?

The following is covered by DLE:

- Living expenses such as food including baby milk/ nappies and hygiene products
- Emergency pre-payment for heating, lighting
- Travel expenses
- Clothing (restrictions apply)

The methods of support will include:

- Supermarket food delivery
- Pre-payment vouchers or card
- Supermarket e-vouchers

Support will not include:

- Cash payments

Conditions of award

A DLE award is intended to cover immediate short-term needs that arise because of a disaster or unforeseen circumstances for those meeting the qualifying criteria. An award may be for a specific item or service or to meet immediate living expenses for a

short period, usually up to a calendar month.

If the applicant has received a DLE grant for the same item or service within the previous 6 months, then a further award will not normally be allocated.

A DLE grant will not be awarded for a repeat occurrence of lost/stolen money regardless of the time lapsed.

A clothing award will be made in respect:

- of those leaving prison after a minimum of 6 months
- as a result of fire/flood and can prove loss of clothing
- of those fleeing domestic violence who do not have access to their property due to advice from the police

The above list is provided to give a set of examples and a DLE will not be appropriate in every case. Similarly, if a situation is not mentioned, it does not mean the applicant would not be entitled to help. The individual circumstances of an application will be considered on its merits. The application will be considered only if a DLE award is the only means by which serious harm or serious risk to the applicant or applicant's family may be prevented.

A DLE award is intended to help the applicant for short-term requirements. It may not necessarily solve the crisis altogether.

The amount of money the applicant is applying for may be queried if it seems too much for his/her needs.

Application and assessment process (direct presentation by the applicant, their appointee, carer, or advocate)

- 1) Applications can be made by telephone or on-line. Reasonable adjustments will be made where the applicant is unable to complete the on-line form without assistance.
- 2) Applications can be made by the applicant, appointee, carer, or advocate acting on their behalf. Proof will be sought that they are acting on behalf of, and with the consent of, the applicant.
- 3) Evidence will be sought from the applicant, appointee, carer, or advocate to ensure that at all qualifying conditions set out in this policy have been met.
- 4) A financial assessment will be made, which will involve a series of questions to establish if the applicant has immediate access to any other form of financial assistance or funding.
- 5) Once the application has been processed, the applicant will be informed of the outcome of the application within 2 hours of the initial telephone call (providing this is prior to 3pm, otherwise this will be the following working day). This will be followed up in writing within 24 hours. If successful, the decision may be made pending the provision of evidence by the applicant, appointee, carer, or advocate.
- 6) If successful:

- a) The award will be issued to the applicant on the same day if a decision is made before 3.00pm that day.
 - or
 - b) If a decision is made after 3.00pm the award will be issued to the applicant on the following working day.
- 7) If unsuccessful, the applicant will be notified of the right to appeal by telephone. Applicants will have the right to appeal in writing or verbally. (See Decision Making and Appeals).
 - 8) A letter (which will be made available in different formats/language), text or e-mail will be sent within 24 hours explaining the award decision and the appeals process.
 - 9) The applicant will be provided with any welfare advice and signposted to other advice agencies where possible and this may include a referral to a foodbank.
 - 10) For successful applicants, relevant evidence (of need and/or identity) will need to be provided or confirmed. Acceptable evidence will be agreed or confirmed with the applicant during the application process.

Application and assessment process (referral from a support organisation)

- 1) Applications will be made by telephone or on-line from the support organisation. Confirmation will be accepted verbally that the organisation is acting on behalf of, and with the consent of the applicant.
- 2) A decision will be made as to whether one of the qualifying conditions have been met. Evidence will be required from a support organisation that the applicant meets all of the qualifying conditions. Details of the treatment, support or care being provided, or whether the applicant is currently engaging with services, are not required.
- 3) A financial assessment will be undertaken, which will involve a series of questions to establish if the applicant has immediate access to any other form of financial assistance or funding.
- 4) The application will be processed and the support organisation will be informed of the outcome of the application by telephone.
- 5) The applicant will be provided with any welfare advice and signposted to other advice agencies where possible.
- 6) If successful:
 - a) The award will be issued to the applicant on the same day if a decision is made before 3.00pm that day.
 - or
 - b) If a decision is made after 3.00pm the award will be issued to the applicant on the following working day.

- 7) For most successful applicants, relevant evidence (of identity) will need to be provided or confirmed. Acceptable evidence will be agreed or confirmed with the support organisation during the application process.
- 8) If unsuccessful, the applicant will be notified of their appeal rights by telephone. Applicants will have the right to appeal in writing or verbally.
- 9) A letter (which will be made available in different formats), e-mail or text will be sent within 24 hours explaining the award decision and the appeals process.

Settlement Grant

An applicant must be resident in County Durham for a minimum of 3 months. Unless the need is for a person who is in the process of moving into County Durham:

- a) either having been in hospital for a long stay or
- b) having other exceptional circumstances where a link to a close family member in County Durham can be proven or
- c) as a result of the Police (i.e. domestic violence)

A grant will not be considered to replace or renew old white goods and furniture. A referral will be made to NE First Credit Union for a low-cost loan.

There will be two stages to the assessment of a Settlement Grant application:

- 1) An assessment of need - to establish if the applicant meets all the qualifying conditions set out in below.
- 2) A financial assessment - to establish if the applicant has any excess income or capital that could be used to meet some or all of the required support or funding.

Qualifying conditions

To qualify for a Settlement Grant, the applicant must meet the following conditions:

- 1) The applicant requires support for at least one of the following:
 - a) Support to move back into the community after a stay in supported or temporary accommodation or prison
 - b) Support to move out of inappropriate accommodation
 - c) Support to stay in the home and prevent a move into residential care or hospital
 - d) Disasters - including events of great or sudden misfortune, the result of which will normally be significant damage to, destruction or loss of possessions or property e.g. floods, fire.
 - e) Support to set up home as part of a planned resettlement programme following an unsettled way of life
- 2) The applicant should be in receipt or about to be in receipt of a qualifying benefit including:
 - Income Support
 - Income-based Job Seeker's Allowance
 - Income-related Employment and Support Allowance
 - Pension Credit
 - Universal Credit
 - Housing Benefit and Council Tax Reduction
- 3) The applicant has no other form of immediate financial assistance, for example

family, friends, employer, own resources or other available funding streams.

- 4) The applicant must be 16 years of age or over.

Settlement Grant Budget

Please note that even if the applicant meets the above criteria an award will not always be given. Consideration will also be given to the balance available in the Settlement Grant budget. In doing this, the priority of each case will be compared to other applications. There is a duty not to overspend the annual budget and consideration will be given to each application on its individual merits.

Settlement

Settlement includes leaving long term hospital stay, residential or nursing care; prison or foster care; help to remain in the community or to help set up home as part of a planned resettlement programme.

Consultation must be undertaken with a social worker or other specialist referral agency about the application.

Whether a grant can be awarded depends on all of the conditions being met and on the needs being of sufficient priority to warrant a payment from limited funds. As part of the decision as to whether a Settlement Grant is awarded consideration will be given to all the circumstances of the application.

Settlement categories include:

Support to move back into the community after a stay in supported or temporary accommodation

Applicants may receive a Settlement Grant if they are leaving accommodation in which they have received significant and substantial care and supervision. Examples of such accommodation are:

- Hospital or another medical establishment
- Care or nursing home
- Hostel
- Staff intensive sheltered or supported housing
- Local authority care
- Prison or detention centre
- Short term supported housing
- Bed and breakfast accommodation with a high level of floating support

Not only must applicants be leaving one of these places, they must be establishing themselves in the community. Account is taken of both the length of time the applicants were receiving care or support within the accommodation, and the level of individual care and supervision that they received while they were living there in order to assess the level of support required.

If applicants are looking after someone, they may be entitled to expenses to assist them to establish themselves in the community if necessary. For example, if they have to move home to look after someone in these circumstances, then they may get help with, for example removal expenses. Applicants would need to be receiving a qualifying benefit or due to receive it even if the person they are caring for does not.

Support to stay in their home and prevent a move into residential care or hospital

Applicants may receive a Settlement Grant if this will help them stay in the community, rather than enter residential care or hospital. Some of the factors considered when making a decision will include:

- How immediate is the likelihood of going into such accommodation?
- How long they are anticipated to remain in such accommodation?
- Whether the type of item or service required would prevent or delay entering such accommodation

If the support will reduce the frequency of stays in such accommodation, some examples are:

- Help with expenses for improving their home to maintain living conditions
- Help to move to a more suitable place to live or to be nearer someone who will give them care and support.

Applicants may also get a Settlement Grant if they are caring for someone and it is agreed that a payment to them will help the person they care for to remain in the community rather than enter accommodation to receive care. Applicants would need to be receiving a qualifying benefit or due to receive it irrespective of whether the person they were caring for does.

To help people set up home in the community, as part of a planned resettlement programme, following an unsettled way of life

People who have been without a settled way of life may have been:

- Using a night shelter
- Staying in a hostel
- Sleeping on the streets or in a make-shift shelter on the streets
- Using an emergency winter shelter
- Using a temporary supported lodging scheme
- Staying in temporary accommodation provided by the Home Office pending a decision on their application for asylum in this country
- Using a combination of these

The grant may be given to help applicants set up home in their own accommodation, if they are on a planned resettlement programme following an unsettled way of life. For example, they may have stayed in a night shelter before they were on a

resettlement programme.

In all cases, the applicant must be resident in County Durham, has previously resided in Durham for 3 months prior to the application or has a proven family link in County Durham.

Support to move out of inappropriate accommodation

Applicants may receive a Settlement Grant to support the move out of inappropriate accommodation in the following circumstances:

- Moving to prevent a move to residential care or hospital
- Moving to flee domestic violence or hate crime
- Moving to specially adapted accommodation
- Homeless

The applicant must provide evidence to support the reason for the move explaining why the current accommodation is unsuitable.

The grant may be given to help pay the removal costs. A grant may be considered for furniture or white goods if the applicant is moving from a furnished property to an unfurnished property.

Grants will not be considered in certain circumstances, see Exclusions.

Support following a disaster

Applicants may receive a Settlement Grant to support the move into new accommodation in the following circumstances:

- Events of great or sudden misfortune with significant damage to goods
- Destruction or loss of possessions/property after a fire or flood

What a Settlement Grant covers

Awards will be made for the provision of:

- Beds
- Bedding
- Chairs/Sofas
- Tables
- Wardrobes
- White goods
- Pans, utensils, crockery and cutlery
- Floor coverings
- Curtains

- Storage or removal costs
- Vacuum Cleaner

Amount of award

The value of the Settlement Grant will be discretionary up to a maximum amount, as determined by the size of the household, related to the needs being presented and the financial situation of applicants. There are 3 levels of awards as follows: -

- i. Single person – maximum award of £500
- ii. Couple – maximum award of £750
- iii. Family and lone parents - £1,000

A full income and expenditure calculation of applicants and their household will be undertaken to determine if they have any excess income that could be used to meet all or part of the cost of the support and this will be reduced, on a pound for pound basis, by any savings the applicants or their partners have over £500 (£1000 if applicants and/or their partners are aged 61 or over).

Awards will be made via a prepayment card or voucher up to a maximum value of £1,000 or goods will be provided up to this amount for the purposes of removal, storage and essential non-fixed household items, such as those listed above.

The cost of carpet(s)/floor coverings will not exceed 50% of their total award and will be included in their maximum award.

Application and assessment (direct presentation by the applicant, their appointee, their carer or advocate)

- 1) Applications will be made by telephone or on-line. Applications can be made by the applicant, or an appointee, carer, or advocate acting on behalf of the applicant. Reasonable adjustments will be made where the applicant is unable to complete the on-line form without assistance. Assistance will be available to help the applicant complete the application form, if required.
- 2) A decision will be taken to assess if all of the qualifying conditions set out above have been met.
- 3) Evidence will be required to show all of those qualifying conditions have been met by either:
 - a) Confirmation by telephone with a specialist
 - b) Referral organisation, or
 - c) Other evidence provided by the applicant, appointee, carer, or advocate based on the individual circumstances of each case.
- 4) A financial assessment will also be made which will involve an assessment of the income and expenditure of the applicant to establish if he/she has any excess income or capital that could be used to meet some or all of the required support.
- 5) The application will be processed, and the applicant informed of the outcome of

his/her application. If successful, the decision may be pending the provision of evidence by the applicant, or confirmation with a specialist referral organisation.

- 6) The applicant will be provided with any relevant welfare advice or signposted to other advice agencies where possible.
- 7) The application will be processed as follows:
 - a) If the application is fully complete, the applicant will be contacted within five working days with a decision

If the application is incomplete, the applicant (or third party, where permission has been given) will be contacted for further information. Once all relevant information and evidence has been received, the applicant will be contacted within five working days with a decision.
 - b) If successful, awards will be provided in line with the applicants' needs but usually not within 48 hours of the award decision
- 8) A letter (which will be made available in different formats and languages) will be sent within five working days explaining the award decision and the appeals process. (See Decision Making and Appeals)

Application and assessment process (referral from a support organisation)

- 1) Applications will be made online or by telephone. The application form will include confirmation that a support organisation is acting on behalf of, and with the consent of the applicant.
- 2) A decision will be made as to whether all of the qualifying conditions set out have been met. Written evidence from a support organisation that the applicant meets all qualifying conditions will be required. Details of the treatment support or care being provided, or whether the applicant is currently engaging with services will not be required.
- 3) A financial assessment will be undertaken which will involve an assessment of the income and expenditure of the applicant to establish if he/she has any excess income or capital that could be used to meet some or all of the required support.
- 4) The application will be processed and the applicant and the support organisation informed of the outcome of his/her application.
- 5) The applicant will be provided with any relevant welfare advice, or signposted to an advice agency, where necessary.
- 6) The application will be processed as follows:
 - a) If the application is fully complete, the applicant and the support organisation will be contacted within five working days with a decision.
 - b) If the application is incomplete, the support organisation will be contacted for further information. Once all relevant information and evidence has been received, the applicant and the specialist referral organisation will be contacted within five working days with a decision.

- c) If successful, awards will be provided in line with the applicants' needs but usually not within 48 hours of the award decision.
- 7) A letter (which will be made available in different formats and languages) will be sent within five working days explaining the award decision and the appeals process. (See Decision Making and Appeals).

Evidence required as part of the application process

Information or evidence may be requested in support of an application for a Welfare Assistance Scheme award.

For DLE, the information and evidence to be provided will be identified during the telephone application and evidence will be provided as part of the application process.

For the Settlement Grant, the information and evidence required will be outlined on the application form and should be provided when the application form is submitted. If evidence is not provided, the applicant or the support organisation will be contacted, requesting the information and evidence required. Applicants or support organisations will be expected to provide the requested information and evidence within five working days and a final decision will be made within five working days, once all requested information and evidence is received.

Any information or evidence provided by the applicant will be verified if required. Any such request will be essential to the decision-making process and will only be used in connection with the Welfare Assistance Scheme. If the applicant is unable to or does not provide the required evidence, the application will be considered on the available information and evidence.

The online application form for both applications will include a set of security questions, including one requiring them to provide evidence that the applicant lives in County Durham.

Examples of evidence that may be required include:

- Passport, driving licence or other evidence of identity e.g. birth certificate
- Wage slips or self-employed accounts
- Benefit or Tax Credit letters
- Bank statements or other evidence of savings
- Receipts, utility bills or other evidence of expenditure
- Doctors letters confirming health conditions or prescriptions for relevant medication
- Contact details for support worker in relevant support agencies (e.g. Social workers)
- Police crime reference number, where the application relates to an alleged crime

Decision making and appeals

Notification of decisions

Once a decision on the Welfare Assistance application has been made, the applicant (and support organisation, if relevant) will be notified of the outcome in writing. For DLE, the decision will also be notified verbally by telephone.

The notification letter will be available in alternative formats and languages and will include the following:

- Where Welfare Assistance is awarded, the item(s) and value to be provided
- Where the Welfare Assistance awarded does not provide all support requested, the reasons for this decision
- Where Welfare Assistance is not awarded, the reasons for this decision
- The applicant's appeal rights
- Information on who to contact if they need further information or advice
- The duty to notify of any changes in circumstances, which may affect either a DLE or a Settlement Grant award.

Daily Living Expenses appeals

An appeal can be lodged about a DLE decision as follows:

- An appeal about a DLE application should be made within five working days of the notification of the decision being made, or a longer period if considered reasonable
- The appeal can be made in writing, verbally or by e-mail.
- The appeal can be made by the applicant, appointee, carer, advocate or a third party, with the applicant's consent where appropriate.
- Where an appeal is made, a dedicated officer will conduct a review of the decision and contact the applicant within one working day of the appeal being received. This will be done by an officer different to the one who made the initial decision and the outcome will be notified verbally by telephone and confirmed in writing.

Settlement Grant appeals

Appeals about Settlement Grants will be dealt with as follows:

- An appeal about a Settlement Grant decision should be made within one calendar month of the notification of the decision being made.
- The appeal can be made in writing, verbally or by e-mail
- The appeal can be made by the applicant, appointee, carer, their advocate or a third party, with the applicant's consent where appropriate
- Where an appeal is made, an Officer will conduct a review of the decision and contact the applicant within five working days of the appeal being received. This will be done by an officer different to the one who made the initial decision and the outcome will be notified in writing. This will be a vigorous process involving liaison with partner agencies.

Exclusions

Support will not be awarded for the following items or services as in most cases signposting to other agencies who can provide support will be given.

- A need which occurs outside County Durham
- An educational or training need including clothing and tools
- School uniform or sports clothes for use at school or equipment to be used at school
- Travelling expenses to or from school
- Meals taken during school holidays by children who are entitled to free school meals
- Expenses in connection with court (legal) proceedings such as legal fees, court fees, fines, costs, damages, subsistence or travelling expenses (other than emergency travelling expenses when stranded away from home)
- Removal or storage charges if the applicant is being re-housed following a compulsory purchase order, a redevelopment or closing order, a compulsory exchange of tenancies, or under a housing authority's statutory duty to the homeless
- Domestic assistance and respite care
- A medical, surgical, optical, aural or dental item or service (these needs can be provided free of charge by the National Health Service, if the applicant is getting Income Support, income-based Jobseeker's Allowance, income related Employment and Support Allowance, Pension Credit or Universal Credit)
- Work related expenses
- Debts to Government departments or Local Authorities
- Investments
- Purchase, installation, rental and call charges for a telephone
- Mobility needs
- Holidays
- A television or a radio, or a licence, aerial or rental charges for a television or a radio
- Garaging, parking, purchase, and running costs of any motor vehicle, except where the payment is being considered for emergency travel expenses
- Housing costs (other than minor repairs and improvements)
- Council Tax or Council Tax arrears

The following people cannot be supported by the Welfare Assistance Scheme

- People who normally reside outside of County Durham
- People who are deemed by a support organisation to have no local connection to the County of Durham
- Care home residents and hospital in-patients, unless the need is for a person

who will be discharged as part of a planned resettlement programme

- Persons who are members of and fully maintained by a religious order
- People in full-time education unless they are entitled to:
 - Income Support
 - Income based Jobseeker's Allowance
 - Income related Employment and Support Allowance
 - Pension Credit
 - Universal Credit
- Prisoners who are in prison or released on temporary licence
- A person who is, or would be, treated as a person from abroad for the purpose of Income Support, income-based Jobseeker's Allowance, income related Employment and Support Allowance, Universal Credit and Pension Credit, and has no entitlement to those benefits, including:
 - Foreign nationals with limited immigration status,
 - Foreign nationals with no recourse to public funds
 - Non-economically active European Union individuals
 - United Kingdom nationals who are not habitually resident in the United Kingdom

Monitoring arrangements for the Welfare Assistance Scheme

The on-line application service offered is integrated with Durham County Council's current revenues and benefits system, thus ensuring that identity checks can be undertaken as part of the Council's monitoring arrangements to ensure the validity of applications.

Durham County Council monitor the number, amount and period of Welfare Assistance Scheme awards in relation to the available Welfare Assistance Scheme budget. The sum paid each month from the annual Welfare Assistance Scheme budget will be a set amount that should be apportioned between DLE and Settlement Grant. In addition, monitoring is undertaken to assess performance against a set of key management information and performance indicators. The purpose is to ensure that there are sufficient funds to meet current and future demands on the Welfare Assistance Scheme budget throughout the financial year and the Council's aims and objectives are being met.

In addition, a sample of cases will be audited at random to ensure consistency in assessment and decision making.

The Council also monitor the type of referrals, which organisations are making referrals and the type of awards to ensure, where possible, they are meeting positive outcomes for the applicant, in accordance with the aims the Welfare Assistance Scheme.

All findings from monitoring checks will be included within the Durham County Council quarterly performance report to its Poverty Action Steering Group.

Compliance with Equality Duties

It is Durham County Council's overall policy to meet equality law requirements and to treat people fairly. Every employee and council representative has a responsibility to treat other people in a fair and lawful way. Durham County Council also takes steps to meet the public sector equality duty which aims to stop unlawful discrimination, advance equality and foster good relations. The Council will monitor where a Welfare Assistance Scheme Application has been refused, to ensure decisions are being made fairly and consistently, in accordance with our Equality duties. This policy will be implemented to provide fair treatment and take account of the needs of people protected under the Equality Act on the grounds of age, disability, gender (including pregnancy and maternity), race, religion or belief, sexual orientation and transgender.

Access to the service

Applications will be received and dealt with at the following times (with the exception of bank and public holidays):

Monday - Thursday 8:30am to 5:00pm

Friday 8:30am to 4:30pm

Counter Fraud

Durham County Council is committed to the fight against fraud in all its forms. An applicant who fraudulently claims or attempts to fraudulently claim a Welfare Assistance Scheme award by falsely declaring their circumstances, providing false statements or evidence in support of their application, may have committed an offence under the Fraud Act 2006. Where it is alleged or suspected that such a fraud may have been committed, the matter will be investigated. If an offence is found to have occurred, action will be taken including, if appropriate criminal proceedings.

Any payments of Welfare Assistance Scheme that have been fraudulently claimed will be recoverable from the person who made the claim.

Review of the policy

This policy will be reviewed as and when required and at least on an annual basis by a steering group and will consider the views of applicants, council staff, Councilors, specialist referral organisations, other referral agencies and other voluntary sector organisations with an interest in the Welfare Assistance Scheme.