

Manchester City Council

Welfare Provision Scheme

Policy Document effective from 23 March 2020

Directorate: Revenues and Benefits Unit
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**MANCHESTER
CITY COUNCIL**

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1. Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to outline the operating principles of the Council's Welfare Provision Scheme and to provide guidance on how the scheme will be administered by the Council.

The Council will provide financial support in the form of grants to Manchester residents who are suffering financial hardship and:

- Have been subject to an emergency or disaster situation, and are at the point of crisis; or
- Have had to move home due to fear of violence, significant health or care needs or as a result of an emergency or disaster, or as part of a supported or emergency rehousing, and their previous furniture is no longer available; or
- Need additional furniture or equipment to enable them to stay within their current home and maintain independent living; or
- Are in a vulnerable group and are in extreme fuel poverty in that they are unable to afford immediate fuel costs or have been disconnected.

The Council will also provide support to residents moving into work but who remain on a low income with the provision of a grant to assist with public transport costs for the first month of employment.

The Council recognises a commitment to support care leavers up to the age of 25 and to ex-members of the Armed Forces within the parameters of the Scheme.

Support for residents during Covid19 is described in Appendix 1.

2. Objectives of the Scheme

The objectives of the Welfare Provision Scheme are to:

- Support Manchester residents who are vulnerable with their immediate hardship needs, enabling them to live an independent life and to complement (but not replace) other specialist care support provided by the Council;
- Prevent short term, exceptional hardship following a crisis or emergency;
- Sustain tenancies, especially where the resident is at greater risk of not maintaining a tenancy, for example after a period of street homelessness or after leaving care;
- Prevent homelessness;
- Keep families together;
- Support people to live independently in their own home;
- Encourage and facilitate people to return to work whenever possible;
- Help to alleviate debt and encourage better money management;
- Help those who are trying to help themselves;
- Help people through personal crises and unforeseeable events; and
- Reduce benefit dependency where possible.



3. Key Principles Underpinning the Scheme

The Welfare Provision Scheme is administered at the discretion of the Council; however there are a number of key principles which underpins its delivery:

- The Council is not under any obligation to provide a scheme;
- The scheme is discretionary, and there is no statutory right to payment or award;
- This scheme is not intended to replicate or take over the responsibility of statutory agencies;
- Each award will have regard to the budget;
- Awards will normally only be made to those who meet eligibility criteria in accordance with this policy. However, even if this is the case the Council has the overriding discretion to refuse an award, and this will be linked to budget restrictions and any other conditionality in this policy;
- Eligibility criteria will be used to ensure that the funds are targeted at the most vulnerable residents and those with greatest need. Decisions on eligibility and exclusion will be reasonable and rational and subject to a certain degree of flexibility and discretion in order to meet exceptional cases and circumstances as and when necessary;
- Residents who do not meet eligibility criteria will be signposted to the wider offer of universal services and support available from the third/community and voluntary sector;
- Each application will be treated on its own merits and will receive equal and fair treatment to take account of the Council's responsibilities under all relevant legislation;
- There is no right to a formal appeal; residents who are found to be ineligible for may however request a reconsideration of their case. This process is listed in this policy; and;
- Each applicant will normally be restricted to a limited number of awards within a set time period, commencing from the date their last application was received.

4. Awards and Assistance provided by the Scheme

The Welfare Provision Scheme normally supports residents with five broad areas of need or circumstances:

- (a) Residents being re-housed/resettled into new accommodation due to fear of violence, significant health/care needs, following a disaster or emergency, or as part of a supported resettlement programme, typically from Supported Accommodation; or
- (b) Residents requiring support to stay within their home and maintain independent living, with significant and enduring medical/care/support needs; or



- (c) Residents requiring immediate financial assistance following a crisis or an emergency. This includes families who report that a child cannot attend school due to a crisis will be considered for or signposted to appropriate support.
- (d) Residents that are in extreme fuel poverty in that they are unable to afford immediate heating costs during the winter months or have been disconnected.
- (e) Residents moving into work (following a period of unemployment) but who remain on a low income with the provision of a grant to assist with public transport costs for the first month of employment. The intention is to sustain employment by ensuring that travel costs are met during the transition period from welfare benefits to salary.

The Welfare Provision Scheme offers support to residents accessing the scheme in the form of grants and essential items as described below:

- Re-housing and resettlement support – Provision of minimum essential furniture items. In most cases this will be limited to the provision of beds (or cot), bedding and linen packs, cooker/microwave, fridge/freezer and kitchen starter pack. In some cases (where health or family circumstances require) the Council will consider the additional provision of a washing machine.
(Normally 1 award per tenancy over a rolling 3 year period); or
- Support to stay within their home – provision of essential furniture or equipment items;
(Normally 1 award per tenancy over a rolling 3 year period); or
- Immediate response to severe fuel poverty – a voucher of up to £49 that is used to top up the resident's fuel card or utility account.
(Normally one award per individual over a rolling 12-month period);
- Support following a crisis or emergency – a cash grant of up to £60.
(Normally one award per individual over a rolling 12-month period); or
- Travel expenses – a cash grant to support the purchase of a bus/travel pass for the first four weeks of employment. (Normally one award per individual).

NB. The number of awards made during the periods indicated will be based on individual circumstances and presenting need.

Depending upon needs and circumstances, it may be possible for a resident to receive more than one type of support.

4.1 Award Provision

Furniture/White Goods

All furniture or goods provided by the Scheme will:

- Be of good quality;



- Be covered by a supplier warranty;
- Be delivered to and, where applicable, installed at the address provided;
- Meet all current regulations including fire protection; all electrical goods will conform to legislation relating to domestic electrical appliances within the UK.

No cash awards will be made available for furniture or white goods items.

Due to the limited funding available and high level of expected claims, the Welfare Provision Scheme will limit the support provided to meet essential needs only, unless there are exceptional circumstances.

Fuel Grants

This will be a one off non repayable grant of up to £49 to support residents with an emergency fuel purchase. This would be normally paid via a PayPoint payment that when collected at the retail unit is transferred to the utility account.

Travel Grants

Provision of a one off non repayable amount equivalent to the most economic cost of public transport to and from the resident's home address for the first four weeks of employment (for example by the provision of a bus pass).

Cash Grants

This will be a one off non repayable grant of between £30 and £60 to support residents following an emergency or crisis. This would be normally received via a PayPoint payment that can be collected at a PayPoint retail unit.

4.2 Outside the scope of this scheme

The Welfare Provision Scheme will not duplicate existing support, payments or awards (whether statutory or discretionary) which are provided by other parts of the Council, other government agencies or third sector organisations.

In addition, the scheme will not provide support for needs which are met through benefits administered by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) including but not exclusive to:

- Short Term Benefit Advances (formally Crisis Loan Alignment Payments),
- Budgeting Loans / Budgeting Advances (for Universal Credit recipients),
- Sure Start Maternity Grants,
- Funeral Payments,
- Cold Weather Payments,
- Winter Fuel Payments, and
- JSA/ESA Hardship Payments. (www.gov.uk/browse/benefits).



This scheme is not normally able to respond to, and mitigate the general impact of the sanctions regime administered by the DWP. Residents will normally be referred to the DWP’s Hardship Scheme.

5. Eligibility Criteria

The Council uses eligibility criteria to ensure that the funds are targeted at the most vulnerable residents and those with greatest need.

Eligibility is tested through three qualifying stages:

1. First Stage – which determines whether residents are eligible based on age, income and residency criteria;
2. Second Stage – which determines whether residents are eligible based on their needs and circumstances criteria;
3. Third Stage – which determines whether residents are eligible based on any further exceptions or exclusions criteria.

At all stages the Council will be mindful of the overall budget expenditure and may have to revise awards and eligibility criteria in order to manage spend with the limited budget allocation.

A resident must meet the criteria for all three stages to qualify for an award. An overview of each stage is as follows:

5.1 First Stage Criteria

The First Stage requires residents to meet all of the following criteria:

No.	Criteria	As Defined By:
1.1	Aged over 16 and live within the Manchester area or where the Council has a duty as defined by homelessness legislation.	Where a resident lives in the area covered by Manchester City Council; or is moving into this area due to domestic violence or as part of a witness protection scheme. In that they have a tenancy or own a property in the city or have been part of a household in the city. The Council will also provide support where we are placing homeless families into accommodation outside of the area and no support is available from the Council where the family will be resident.
1.2	Is in receipt of (or have claimed and are likely to get) either: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Income Support; 	Resident has claimed and likely to be entitled to* or is in receipt of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Income Support;

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Jobseeker's Allowance; ● Employment Support Allowance; ● Guaranteed Pension Credit; or ● Universal Credit. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Jobseeker's Allowance; ● Employment Support Allowance; ● Guaranteed Pension Credit; or ● Universal Credit**. <p>*This is for people who may be moving due to domestic violence or as part of a witness protection scheme.</p> <p>**Dependent on other income</p>
1.3	Have no savings or capital.	Including savings in cash, money in banks, saving schemes, premium bonds, stocks, shares and investments in property or land.

Residents who do not meet the first stage criteria will be signposted to appropriate support and provision within their area/communities.

5.2 Second Stage Criteria

The Second Stage requires residents to meet one or more of the following criteria:

No.	Criteria	Evidence requirements
2.1	Residents being re-housed/resettled into new accommodation due to fear of violence, significant health/care needs, following a disaster or emergency, or as part of supported or emergency rehousing.	Evidence of the reason for moving will be required as well as evidence as to why furniture from the previous property is not available.
2.2	Residents requiring support to stay within their home and maintain independent living, with significant and enduring medical/care/support needs;	Evidence of the reason for the need for this support will be required from a health or social care professional.
2.3	Residents requiring immediate financial assistance.	Each case is considered based on its own merits and the crisis or emergency could include evidence from other parts of the Council, the landlord or the police.
2.4	Residents that are in specific vulnerable groups and are in extreme fuel poverty in that they are unable to afford immediate	Within the household there are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Children under 5; or



	heating costs during the winter months.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A member of the family with a disability or serious health needs; or • Over pension age ; or • Other vulnerability issues for which each case would be considered on own merits.
2.5	To provide residents who have just started work but remain on a low income with help towards public transport costs so they are able to get to work.	Resident employed after a period of at least 6 months of unemployment. New salary/wages at or below the UK living wage (currently £9.30)

Residents who do not meet the second stage criteria will be signposted to appropriate support and provision within their area/communities.

5.3 Third Stage Criteria

The Third Stage requires residents to meet all of the following criteria:

No.	Criteria	As Defined By:
3.1	A resident does not meet any of the schemes exclusions	See section 5.4.
3.2	Support required is not available or cannot be provided elsewhere	
3.3	Sufficient welfare funds are available at the time of application	

Residents who do not meet the third stage criteria will be signposted to appropriate support and provision within their area/communities.

5.4 Exclusions

Residents will usually be excluded from receiving support where they:

- (i) have exceeded the agreed maximum number of funding awards over a given timescale (see section 4 (i));
- (ii) are already receiving support from other areas (we do not duplicate funds);
- (iii) have no recourse to public funds (NRPF) status (considered as part of the Section 21 funding arrangements with Children and Families Directorate);

5.5 Exceptions

Decisions on eligibility and exclusion will be reasonable and rational and subject to a certain degree of flexibility and discretion in order to meet exceptional cases and circumstances as and when necessary.



Examples of exceptional cases and circumstances may include victims fleeing domestic violence who do not meet the First Stage criteria on residency or income, or residents who are displaced as a result of a major disaster or civil contingency issues such as fire, flood or gas explosion who would not normally meet income criteria.

6. Making a Claim

All applications should be made using the online application form accessed through the Council's website www.manchester.gov.uk/benefits

To ensure maximum accessibility for the online application, support can be provided in four ways:

- (i) Self service – by the person or household requiring support;
- (ii) Supported by a family member or friend;
- (iii) Supported self service by a third party organisation, such as a Registered Provider, Advice Agency, Probation Service or charity organisation;
- (iv) Supported self service within the Council – including within the Council's Customer Service Centre or Libraries.

Applicants will be asked a series of questions to establish whether they satisfy the criteria, whether funds are available to them, and to identify support which is already in place.

7. Data Sharing

On application, residents are required to sign a disclaimer agreement which will enable back office staff to use data from existing benefits claims (for example, Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support) and Council Tax records as evidence of eligibility for funds and residency.

In addition, where appropriate a referral to other Council departments or external agencies will be made to provide advice and support for example Social Services, Homelessness, and Complex Families.

The Council may also share data for cross checking purposes both internally and with external organisations; including government departments, for the prevention and detection of fraud and/or crime. This may include checks to confirm entitlement to discounts and exemptions.

Any use of personal data will be in full accordance with the Data Protection Act 2018 and the General Data Protection Regulation 2018.

8. Awarding and Making a Decision



In deciding whether to provide support and the amount of any payment awarded, the Welfare Provision Scheme will consider:

- Whether the resident meets the eligibility criteria;
- Any evidence, or lack of evidence to support the claim;
- The amount of the remaining budget at the time of the award;
- The financial circumstances of the applicant and their family (including any savings or benefits which could be used to contribute towards the costs);
- The impact on other services within the Council if a payment is not awarded for example Social Care;
- Any existing support, payments or awards (whether statutory or discretionary) which are provided by other parts of the Council, other government agencies or third sector organisations;
- Any steps already taken, or that can be taken in the future by the applicant to alleviate the problem or crisis; or
- Whether the applicant has contributed towards the crisis or emergency.

8.1 Timescales

The Welfare Provision Scheme operates during the working hours of 9am-5pm, Monday to Friday. Residents may apply for support outside of these working hours; however the application will not be processed until the earliest possible time during working hours. The Council does not provide awards out of these hours. The aim is to deal with applications within the following timescales:

- For cash grants following a crisis or emergency - within two days of receiving the application.
- For travel grants - within five days of receiving the application.
- For furniture/white goods grants - within ten days of receiving the application.
- For fuel grants - within two working days of receiving the application.

PLEASE NOTE THAT DUE TO COVID19 THERE IS VERY HIGH DEMAND AND THE TEAM MAY NOT BE ABLE TO PROCESS APPLICATIONS IN LINE WITH THE TIMESCALES INDICATED

8.2 Notification

Once a decision has been made on whether an application has been successful or not, the claimant is advised in writing with the reasons for this decision. They will also be told by telephone or by email of the decision if these are provided.

PLEASE NOTE THAT DUE TO COVID19 DECISIONS ARE CURRENTLY CONFIRMED BY TELEPHONE OR EMAIL ONLY.



If successful an explanation is provided of the support and how the award will be made. If an application is unsuccessful details of the reconsideration process are provided.

9. Reconsideration Procedure

Residents who apply for support and are deemed to be ineligible may ask for a reconsideration of the decision.

Reconsiderations must be received within 28 days of the original application decision date.

When a reconsideration request is received the Council will conduct a reconsideration of the decision. All reconsiderations are considered by an officer not involved in the original decision and a decision will be made within 10 days of when the request was received.

There is no right to reconsideration if the award has been refused because the scheme's budget has been exhausted. Funds are monitored on a monthly basis.

10. Fraud

The Council is committed to prevent fraud in all its forms. A claimant who tries to make a claim to the Welfare Provision Scheme fraudulently by falsely declaring their circumstances, providing a false statement or evidence in support of their application, may have committed an offence under the Fraud Act 2006.

Where it is alleged, or the Council suspects that such a fraud may have been committed, the matter will be investigated and if fraud is found to have occurred, action will be taken including sanctions against future claims or if appropriate criminal proceedings.

11. Policy Review

In addition to an annual review, the policy will be reviewed in the light of any budget changes, legislative changes; trends or other factors that impact on the effectiveness of the policy.



Appendix One

Response to COVID 19

April 2020

This is an iterative document that will pick up changes and developments as they arise and will capture how money is to be used to support the most pressing need.

1. Introduction

The Government Hardship Scheme has provided some additional funds to support vulnerable residents in the city.

The following funds have been set aside to support the Council priorities identified (see the bullet points below). These proposals are based on the position as understood at the present time and may change in some areas to respond to new and emerging requirements.

- Provision of lunch time meals for children £700,000
- Emergency fund to support Council Tax payers in the city who may not be in receipt of Council Tax Support £500,000
- Emergency food provision (as required tbd) £200,000
- Support for carers £200,000
- Additional support to the Welfare Provision Scheme to support households that might be facing a crisis or emergency £200,000

The WPS Scheme will deal with the following areas:

- Provision of lunch time meals for children
- Emergency food provision (as required to be determined)
- Support for carers
- Additional support to the Welfare Provision to support households facing a crisis or emergency

2. Changes to Welfare Provision Scheme to respond to COVID 19

The Council's Welfare Provision Scheme would normally only help those households in receipt of a qualifying means tested benefit facing crisis or an emergency or if they are being supported to move home due to complex circumstances e.g. homelessness or leaving hospital.

The Council has temporarily amended the scheme so that applications can be considered in exceptional circumstances to meet immediate need from extremely vulnerable households. This includes households with children eligible for Free School Meals; households with children who may not be eligible for Free School Meals; households not currently in receipt of means tested benefits.



Examples of support will typically include a one-off Free School Meal award of £10 per-week per dependant child covering a four-week period and may also include an emergency cash grant to address wider household food needs, or a fuel grant.

Support is also offered to carers, including those households where a child or young person is the carer to ensure the ongoing health and well being of both the carer and the person who needs care. This could be travel or transport costs, including taxis, furniture or white goods needed as a result of the disability or caring needs or emergency funds for food, food delivery and fuel.

Each case will be considered on the individual merits of the case, cognisant of the budget. Typically only one 'Covid19' award will be made to eligible households that apply during the time-limited period this element of the Scheme is available.

To support these temporary changes adjustments have been made to Section 2.1 of the First Stage Criteria for eligibility set out at Section 5.1 of the core scheme. These temporary adjustments are shown at Appendix 2.

The core Scheme is not designed to mitigate for situations where residents are waiting for a payment of Universal Credit or other welfare benefit. There is an expectation that residents who have become unemployed or experienced a substantial fall in income will make a prompt claim for Universal Credit or seek other available financial support from the Government. The WPS 'Covid19' award is only designed to support residents who are in an immediate crisis situation.

3. Provision of lunch time meals for children

3.1 Go-live of the Government's Scheme

The government has recently announced a national scheme that will provide schools with a process to provide parents with retail vouchers equivalent to £15 per week per child that is entitled to free school meals due to low income, or as an asylum seeker, or those subject to 'no recourse to public funds' conditions. The government has said that this will go live straightaway. Schools need to register and provide pre-payment cards or e-codes to parents and carers that meet the criteria and approach the school for help.

The government has committed to fund the provision of these grants for term time periods, although it is stated that schools could, should they wish to do so, award grants for the holidays but that these payments would be funded from local school funds.

The National Voucher Scheme is an option for schools to offer families of pupils eligible for benefits-related free school meals an alternative.

DFE links below for further details on the National Voucher Scheme:-

[National Scheme overview](#)

3.2 Council and Manchester schools

It is important to note that this advice is for children whose parents are entitled to free school meals due to low income, or as an asylum seeker, or those subject to 'no recourse to public funds' conditions.

- For schools that have opted into this scheme, The Manchester Local Free School Meals Scheme will continue for these families until Friday 17th April and from Monday 20th April all Manchester Schools will transfer to the National Voucher Scheme.
- At this point the Manchester Local Free School Meals Scheme will not be available to parents and carers of children that are normally entitled to free school meals and any enquiries will be forwarded to the school.
- This time period before going live with the government scheme will allow schools to do preparatory work so that they can all start from an agreed date that will be communicated to parents and carers.
- Until the implementation of the national scheme, the Manchester Local Free School Meals Scheme will pay £10 per child per week and will also pay the same amount for each child over the Easter holidays. This will be a payment of £40 per child in total for four weeks.
- Additional costs due to paying over the Easter holiday will be met by the Council using the Hardship Scheme money provided to the Council.
- As a result of this parents will receive £40 for each child entitled to free school meals for the period 23rd March to 17th April 2020.
- Schools will be recharged by the Council for money paid out equivalent to an amount of money that they can claim from the government, which may include or exclude school's funding for FSM, we are waiting for DfE to release further details.
- The school's recharge will be based on the number of children in receipt of free school meals that have received a grant.

3.3 The Manchester Scheme - Help with food costs while schools are closed

We want to ensure that all our children and young people have access to a lunchtime meal.

We have the following arrangements in place to support families during this period:-

- Pupils eligible for Free school meal - please see the Council's [Local Free School Meals Scheme](#) (via Welfare Provision).
- Hardship support to families facing financial crisis.

Please read this information carefully before making an application.

3.3.1 Free school meal pupils - School age children who would normally receive a free school meal from the school, based on household income, or due to being an asylum seeker, or those subject to 'no recourse to public funds' conditions

The government has advised that they expect to have a new scheme up and running very soon, see above para "Go Live of Government's Scheme"

Until the **national voucher scheme is in place** we have made local arrangements to support families. Some schools are picking this up by providing lunches and vouchers and other schools have asked the Council to make payments on their behalf.

If your school is not providing support and you normally receive free school meals due to low income please make a claim for support.

Please note we cannot make a payment if your school has alternative arrangements in place.

The contribution towards a lunchtime meal is £2.00 per day (£10 per week) for each school child or young person in the household.

We will be able to pay this money within a few days by the following methods:

- A bank transfer into a nominated bank account - this is the safest and best option
- A secure text message that can be used to access cash from a range of PayPoint outlets in the city
- A voucher that can be printed and can then be exchanged for cash from a range of PayPoint outlets in the city.

Parents can make an application - please submit a request via the [Council's Welfare Provision Scheme](#).

The DfE have confirmed that schools will be reimbursed for the cost of provision of FSM prior to the launch of the national FSM voucher scheme. Given this schools will be recharged for the cost of the payments when using the Council's scheme (as detailed above see para: Proposed way forward for the Council and Manchester schools). Schools who wanted to opt-out and have made their own arrangements, have sent notification of opting out to finance4schools@manchester.gov.uk.

3.3.2 Hardship -To support to families facing hardship

Because schools have closed and some families are facing additional financial challenges due to the Covid 19 virus, we want to provide support to families, who most need it.

We are providing a financial grant to parents and carers of the following groups of school age children and young people.

To qualify the family must be:



- a Manchester resident or supported by our Homelessness Service; and
- whose family has been hardest hit by the recent issues and may be waiting for benefits to be assessed or have a gap in their income due to being laid off etc.

The contribution towards a lunchtime meal is £2 per day (£10 per week) for each school age child or young person in the household.

We will be able to pay this money within a few days by the following methods:

- A bank transfer into a nominated bank account - this is the safest and best option
- A secure text message that can be used to access cash from a range of PayPoint outlets in the city
- A voucher that can be printed and can then be exchanged for cash from a range of PayPoint outlets in the city.

To make an application, families need to submit a request via the [Council's Welfare Provision Scheme](#).

Note: The costs of support to families facing hardship will be met by the Local Authority and will still be offered after the national voucher scheme for FSM is launched.

4. Food poverty

At present, this money is held and will be allocated to meet Council priorities and may include support for the COVID hub, support to food banks or direct support to households in the city facing hardship.

5. Support for Carers

Support is available to carers, including those households where a child or young person is the carer, to ensure the ongoing health and well being of both the carer and the person who needs care. This could be travel or transport costs, including taxis, furniture or white goods needed as a result of the disability or caring needs or emergency funds for food, food delivery and fuel.



Appendix Two

Temporary adjustments made to Section 2.1 of the First Stage Criteria for eligibility set out at Section 5.1 (see page 6) of the core scheme.

<p>1.2</p>	<p>Is in receipt of (or have claimed and are likely to get) either:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Income Support; ● Jobseeker's Allowance; ● Employment Support Allowance; ● Guaranteed Pension Credit; or ● Universal Credit. <p>Or:</p> <p>Is self-employed, experienced a significant drop in income, and either not eligible for the Government Self-employment Income Support Scheme or yet to receive support from the Scheme.</p> <p>Or:</p> <p>Is a carer</p>	<p>Resident has claimed and likely to be entitled to or is in receipt of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Income Support; ● Jobseeker's Allowance; ● Employment Support Allowance; ● Guaranteed Pension Credit; ● Universal Credit**; or <p>**Dependent on other income</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Self-employment Income Support Scheme. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The income of the carer or the person receiving care comes within one of the categories above.
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