Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council

Crisis and Resilience Fund:

Crisis Payments Policy

2026/27

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1.0 Background, Objectives and Principles

From 1st April 2026 the Crisis and Resilience Fund (CRF) has been made available to local authorities to support low-income households who encounter a financial shock and to support activity that builds individual and community financial resilience.

This policy focuses on Crisis Payments and the provision of effective crisis support.

Well timed and effective crisis support can prevent a financial shock creating or escalating a crisis.

Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council will administer a Crisis Payments Scheme to provide immediate assistance to households experiencing financial hardship, an emergency, or an unexpected financial shock. Crisis Payments will be funded by the CRF.

The scheme forms part of the Council's wider commitment to:

- Tackle inequality and poverty.
- Prevent hardship and crisis.
- Support vulnerable residents.
- Help residents maintain independence within their community.
- Prevent homelessness and destitution.
- Safeguard the health and wellbeing of individuals and families.

The scheme is discretionary. There is no statutory entitlement to an award.

All applications will be assessed on individual circumstances, available evidence, identified need and the availability of funding.

The scheme is intended to provide short-term assistance and cannot be used as a source of ongoing income for residents.

Applicants in receipt of an immediate Crisis Payment will be referred for further support, relevant to their personal circumstances, to continue to provide them with support to manage their circumstances further and create financial resilience to financial shock.

2.0 Crisis Payments

Crisis Payments are designed to support low-income households who:

- Are experiencing an emergency or immediate financial crisis
- Have suffered an unexpected financial shock.
- Require support to prevent a crisis from escalating.
- Have no reasonable alternative means of meeting an essential need.

Examples may include:

- Disasters – Unforeseen and result in significant damage to possessions or property, such as serious fire, flood, explosion etc
- Accident, Health Emergency or Mental Health crisis – leading to unplanned spending
- Domestic Abuse – where immediate help is needed to move to alternative safe accommodation
- Breakage of an essential item – such as medical equipment, boiler, white goods
- Lost or Stolen Money – where emergency living expenses are needed
- Gap in Income – a short term gap in income, for example, due to redundancy

Support will only be provided where the Council is satisfied that the applicant's need cannot reasonably be met from another source of income.

Crisis Payments are intended to meet occasional or short-term needs and cannot provide an alternative source of regular income. Crisis Payments may be made to support, but are not limited to, the following:-

- Food
- Water, including for drinking, washing, cooking, as well as for sanitary purposes and sewerage
- Period and hygiene products such as soap and toothpaste
- Energy for any form of fuel that is used for the purpose of domestic heating, cooking or lighting, including oil or portable gas cylinders
- Clothing, including uniform, warm winter clothing and shoes
- Essential furniture and appliances such as beds and bedding, washing machines, window coverings, carpets, fridge-freezers and ovens
- Essential transport-related costs such as repairing a car, buying a bicycle or bus pass or paying for fuel
- Digital and connectivity essentials such as broadband or phone bills

3.0 Available Support and Award Values

Awards will be made to meet essential needs only.

3.1 Food Support

Food awards may be provided where a household has insufficient resources to purchase food.

Award Values

- **Up to £50**

During the establishment phase of the scheme, support will primarily be delivered through cash vouchers. The Council may introduce direct cash payments and other payment mechanisms to provide greater flexibility, choice and accessibility for residents.

3.2 Essential Living Needs

Awards may be provided to help with vital living needs, including:

- Period and hygiene products such as soap and toothpaste
- Clothing, including uniform, warm winter clothing and shoes
- Digital and connectivity essentials such as broadband or phone bills

Award Values

- **Up to £50**

During the establishment phase of the scheme, support will primarily be delivered through cash vouchers. The Council may introduce direct cash payments and other payment mechanisms to provide greater flexibility, choice and accessibility for residents.

3.3 Essential Energy and Utility Costs

Support may be provided towards:

- Gas
- Electricity
- Pre-payment meters
- Essential domestic fuel costs

Award Value

- **Up to £100**

During the establishment phase of the scheme, support will primarily be delivered through cash vouchers. The Council may introduce direct cash payments and other payment mechanisms to provide greater flexibility, choice and accessibility for residents.

3.3 Essential Travel Support

Travel assistance may be considered where it is necessary to:

- Access employment.
- Attend a medical appointment.
- Escape domestic abuse.
- Prevent homelessness.
- Access essential support services.

Award Value

- **Up to £30**

During the establishment phase of the scheme, support will primarily be delivered through cash vouchers. The Council may introduce direct cash payments and other payment mechanisms to provide greater flexibility, choice and accessibility for residents.

3.4 Furniture and White Goods Support

Where a household is unable to access essential household items and there is a demonstrated need to maintain independent living, the Council may provide furniture or white goods.

Examples include:

- Second hand furniture
- Cooker
- White goods

Method of Support

Unlike other awards, furniture and white goods will be provided as physical goods supplied by the Council's approved provider.

No cash alternative will be offered.

The value of items supplied will be determined in accordance with Council procurement arrangements and standard pricing schedules.

3.5 Maximum Awards

A household may receive:

A maximum of THREE (3) Crisis Payment awards within any rolling 12-month period.

An award can include payments for food, living needs, energy and utility, and travel.

Furniture and white goods awards will normally be restricted to one furniture/white goods award within any rolling twelve-month period.

Further awards will only be considered in exceptional circumstances.

4.0 Eligibility

Applications will be reviewed on a need-based approach, that recognises the varied circumstances that the individuals may experience. The preferences, needs and values of the individual applying for crisis support remains central to the Council's decision-making process. Information will be gathered via the application regarding the applicant's circumstances to identify their preferences, symptoms and underlying needs.

Successful awards will be made where a crisis is demonstrated through a circumstance of pressing need which requires immediate action to prevent or remedy negative outcomes.

This could include, but is not limited to, an applicant going without material essentials such as food, shelter, heating, essential items such as furniture and appliances or services such as water or energy.

The cause or preventability of the crisis is not considered a relevant factor.

In order to qualify for a payment under this scheme, applicants must demonstrate that they are experiencing a financial shock or crisis. Example of what constitutes a crisis, may include, but is not limited to: -

- **Disasters** – unforeseen and result in significant damage to, or loss of, possessions or property, such as serios flood or fire, gas explosion or a chemical leak
- **Accident, Health Emergency or Mental Health Crisis** – leading to unplanned spending or increased expenditure incurred

- **Domestic Abuse** – where an applicant is leaving an abusive relationship/partner and needs immediate help such as moving into an unfurnished property and needing help with furniture and appliances
- **Breakage of an essential item** - for example, a boiler, medical equipment, white goods
- **Lost or Stolen Money** – and essential living expenses are required
- **Gap in Income** – a short term gap in regular income, for example due to redundancy or a significant change in working pattern

Crisis Payments are not limited to those in receipt of benefits but are intended to support a wide range of low-income households.

To qualify, applicants must:

- Be aged 18 or over.
- Be a resident within the Sandwell borough and be liable for council tax.
- Be responsible for the household costs at their address.
- Be experiencing financial hardship, crisis or exceptional circumstances.
- Demonstrate that support cannot reasonably be obtained from another source.

Priority will be given to households:

- Receiving means-tested benefits.
- With dependent children.
- Containing disabled adults or children.
- Containing vulnerable adults.
- Experiencing domestic abuse.
- At risk of homelessness.

Receipt of benefits is not an automatic requirement where financial hardship can otherwise be demonstrated.

Applications will be assessed using a needs-based approach.

To be considered for an award an applicant must be able to demonstrate that they are on low income. For the purposes of this scheme a household can be considered low income if any of the following apply:

- Households must have an annual income of £30,000 or less if they live alone, or £40,000 or less if it's a multi person household. Annual income is determined by using gross annual income from earnings or self-employed earnings and ANY state benefits that may be in payment (example, Universal Credit, State Pension, CTC, WTC, CB etc)
- Applicants (and partners if applicable) must have total of less than £1,000 in savings. However, If the applicant is unable to release money in their assets immediately, but can demonstrate that they are taking steps to do so, they may be eligible for an award in the interim
- Applicants are in receipt of a means tested, passported benefit, including Universal Credit, Pension Credit (Guaranteed Credit), Housing Benefit, or Council Tax Reduction
- Applicants have satisfied an affordability test of their household income and expenditure and accessible capital, and they can demonstrate that the household does not have sufficient resources to resolve the immediate crisis without going without essentials, incurring unmanageable debt or exacerbating financial harm

It may be identified that the most appropriate method to support an applicant would be through a referral for further support, but may not receive a Crisis Payment.

Exemptions

The following people are excluded for support in all circumstances:

- Prisoners and people lawfully detained, including those released on temporary licence (but not those released on parole or on bail pending a court hearing)
- Members of a religious order who are fully maintained by the order

The following people are excluded from support except in very limited circumstances:

- Full-time students can only receive support for expenses arising out of a disaster
- Someone who is a 'person from abroad' (i.e. who fails or would fail the habitual residence test for the purpose of Income Support, Pension Credit, Income-based Job Seekers Allowance or Income Related Employment Support Allowance, Universal Credit) can only receive support for expenses arising out of a disaster

<u>Benefit Sanctions</u>

People subject to certain disallowances or sanctions to their Job Seekers Allowance, Employment Support Allowance, Income Support, Pension Credit or Universal Credit or equivalent welfare benefits will not normally be eligible for support.

However, because of the nature of benefit sanctions each case will be considered on its own merits and where it is clear that failing to provide support would present significant risk to the claimant or, their immediate family or dependant which cannot be met by another source then support may be provided.

5.0 Exclusions

Support will not normally be provided where:

- The need can be met through another statutory service.
- Sufficient savings or accessible capital are available.
- The request relates to non-essential expenditure.
- The application concerns ongoing living costs rather than an immediate crisis.
- False or misleading information has been provided.

The Council reserves the right to refuse applications where evidence of need is not provided and sufficient information is unavailable to assess the claim.

6.0 Application Process

Applications may be made:

- Online via the Council website.
- By telephone where digital access is unavailable.
- Through an authorised representative acting on behalf of the applicant.

Applicants may be required to provide:

- Proof of identity.
- Proof of address.
- Benefit information.
- Evidence of the crisis or emergency.

Applicants will be required to provide one month's bank statement to support the verification and assessment process. This will be requested at the point of application. In some extreme circumstances, it may not be essential to provide a bank statement

and verification of the bank details will be made via the software used to process the applications (Ascendant).

The Council may request additional information where necessary.

The applicant must provide full details of their circumstances that have led to the financial shock and the nature of support that they require.

Management information will be collected via the application form.

7.0 Decision Making

All applications will be assessed by authorised officers within the Revenues and Benefits Service.

Officers will consider:

- The nature of the crisis.
- Household circumstances.
- Financial resources available.
- Vulnerability factors.
- Previous awards received.
- Whether other support is available.

The Council reserves the right to verify all information supplied.

8.0 Method of Award

Food, Energy and Travel

Crisis Payments will be paid via cash voucher and operated primarily on an application basis.

Applicants will require crisis support for a variety of reasons, such as provision of food, utilities, household goods etc. Although the initial method of payment is via a voucher scheme, cash payments enable people to address specific needs with dignity and choice and empower individuals and families to make informed choices to best suit their circumstances. For this reason, payments are to be made on a Cash-First basis directly into their bank account from the details provided on their application form.

Further work will be developed into the use of 'cash-out' vouchers and other digital methods.

Where it is deemed that a voucher would be a more effective method of payment, a voucher will be issued using the Council's voucher provider. The most appropriate voucher will be selected based on the individual circumstances.

Furniture and White Goods

Where approved, support will be provided through the direct provision of goods.

Items will be ordered from the Council's approved supplier and delivered directly to the applicant.

No cash payment or voucher will be issued.

9.0 Notification

Applicants will be informed of the outcome as soon as reasonably practicable. The usual method will be electronically via email unless this is not possible then notification will be sent in writing.

Notification will include:

- Whether the application has been successful.
- The type of support awarded.
- The value of the award.
- Instructions on how to access the support.
- Review rights where applicable.

Where an application is refused, a reason for refusal will be provided.

10.0 Review and Reconsideration

Applicants may request a review where they believe:

- Relevant information has been overlooked.
- A factual error has been made.
- New evidence is available.

Such requests should normally be made within one calendar month of the decision.

Reviews will be undertaken by an officer not involved in the original decision.

The review decision will be final.

11.0 Equality Duty

In administering this scheme, Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council will have due regard to its obligations under the Equality Act 2010.

The Council is committed to:

- Eliminating discrimination.
- Advancing equality of opportunity.
- Fostering good relations between communities.

Applications will be considered fairly and consistently regardless of:

- Age
- Disability
- Sex
- Gender reassignment
- Race
- Religion or belief
- Sexual orientation
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Marriage and civil partnership

12.0 Monitoring Arrangements

The Council will monitor:

- Number of applications received.
- Number of awards made.
- Value of awards.

- Refusal rates.
- Customer demographics.
- Repeat applications.

Monitoring information will be used to ensure the scheme operates fairly, consistently and within available budgets.

13.0 Policy Review

This policy will be reviewed annually or sooner where:

- Funding arrangements change.
- Government guidance changes.
- Operational improvements are identified.

14.0 Publicity

The scheme will be publicised on the Council's website.