

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT 2000

Your request for information has now been considered and the Council's response to your questions is shown below.

You asked:

1. How many people of working age received council tax benefit in the last financial year?

25,037 working age people received council tax benefit in the last financial year.

2. What are your plans for replacing council tax benefit?

Leicester City Council will be replacing Council Tax Benefit with Leicester's Council Tax Reduction Scheme.

The details of the scheme can be found at www.leicester.gov.uk/housingbenefit

3. What is your estimate of how many people you expect to be paying some/more council tax from April 2013 and the average amount?

Based on our modelling exercise undertaken in September 2012 we estimated that

- i) 18,629 people would be paying council tax from April 2013, when previously not paying council tax
- ii) 6609 would be paying increased council taxes
- iii) I am unable to quantify the average amount accurately, however based on fact that the majority of properties affected in Leicester City are Band A and B properties a family and single person currently in receipt of 100% Council Tax Benefit will have to pay the following in April 2013:

- Family in Band A property will have to pay annually =£197.85
 - Weekly = £2.85
- Family in Band B property will have to pay annually = £280.83
 - Weekly = £4.44
- Single person in Band A property will have to pay annually = £ 148.39
 - Weekly = £2.85
- Single person in Band B property will have to pay annually = £173.12
 - Weekly = £3.33

An annual average of these figures equates to £200.05

4. How many people applied for Social Fund support in the last financial year?

Figures taken from DWP website state 11,080 people applied for Social Fund support in Leicester City last financial year.

Please note that these figures are not produced or provided by Leicester City Council.

5. How many people received Social Fund support in the last financial year?

Figures taken from DWP website state 8,480 people received Social Fund Support in the last financial year.

Please note that these figures are not produced or provided by Leicester City Council.

6. What is the total funding you provided under the Social Fund last year?

We did not provide funding under the Social Fund last year. The Social Fund was administered by the Department of Work and Pensions last year.

7. What are your plans for replacing the Social Fund?

The main features of our draft Community Support Grant Scheme are that:

- the scheme is purely discretionary; a customer does not have a statutory right to an award;
- awards will be made by way of a voucher/card/goods system. Cash will only be paid in extreme circumstances and where there is no other alternative
- the amount that can be paid out by a council in any financial year will be determined by the amount of funding received from the government.

The main aim of the scheme will be to support vulnerable people, experiencing financial difficulties. The support will be given for food, goods or services in a crisis situation or where there is exceptional financial pressure on an individual or families.

There are two types of areas where Community Support will be considered.

These are:

- where a person is in crisis, where the financial support is **immediate and urgent**. The payment to be considered is a **Crisis Payment**
- where the person is in need of support due to financial hardship but where the need is **not immediate**, this is a **Support Grant**.

What is a Crisis?

A **crisis** is defined as:

- Where there is a severe risk to the health and safety of the applicant or an immediate family member as a result of having no financial funds available to meet daily living expenses.
- An event of great or sudden misfortune, such as major flooding, gas explosion or a house fire.

A **Support Grant** will be considered for vulnerable people in financial crisis, for a range of expenses including household equipment. The award is also intended to support a return to, or allow a person to remain in the community rather than enter accommodation to receive care, or to ease exceptional pressure on families.

Some examples are:

- help with expenses for improving the home to maintain living conditions
- help where the house/accommodation has experienced a fire or flood and in order to return to the accommodation household equipment needs to be replaced.
- help to move to a more suitable place to live or to be nearer someone who will provide care and support.

Some examples of situations that may give rise to exceptional pressure are:

- someone in the family suffers from a disability or chronic sickness which gives rise to an exceptional need and where that need cannot be met by another support fund e.g. Disability Living Allowance/Personal Independent Payment
- there is, or has been, a breakdown of relationships within the family, (including domestic violence)
- domestic upheaval because of unforeseen circumstances such as house fire, flooding, theft or other disaster.

Each case will be treated strictly on its own merits and all customers will receive equal and fair treatment within a transparent process taking full account of the Council's responsibilities under all relevant government legislation, to meet standing statutory duties under Homeless, Equalities, Human Rights Act and Child Protection legislation. Decisions under the scheme must be made in accordance with the principles of good decision making and decision makers should act fairly, reasonably and consistently.

The council is committed to working with the local voluntary sector, social landlords and other stakeholders in the City to maximise entitlement to all available state benefits, charitable funds and grants, this will be reflected in the administration of the Community Support Grant Scheme. The council also works closely with money and welfare benefits advice services across the city to provide budgeting and income maximisation advice.

The council has prepared a draft policy which has yet to be formally agreed. I can confirm that an impact assessment has been completed and constructive engagement and consultation with internal partners has been undertaken and as a consequence consideration given to include some additional qualifying criteria.

1. How can people apply to make use of the Fund?

The aim will be to have an online application route, however there is likely to be a dedicated telephone line where applications can be made. The administering officer would ask key questions over the telephone to determine initial basic qualifying criteria, such as whether they live within the city, before leading through to taking the application details.

2. Which groups of residents or cases of hardship is the City Council targeting in its administration of the Fund, and who will be eligible to use the fund? Additionally, which groups are likely to not qualify for assistance when the Council's administration of the Fund commences?

Unfortunately there has only been limited information available from the Department of Works and Pension as to how the current funding is allocated so it has been difficult to assess:

- exactly which individuals in the city access are likely to access the fund,
- what their protected characteristics are
- and because of this has limited the analysis and conclusions reached within the councils impact assessment.

It is also recognised that the new scheme will be introduced at a time when a number of Welfare reform changes are due to be implemented therefore there is a significant financial risk for the authority and anticipated significant increase in need.

The council will treat all applications on their individual merits, and will seek through the operation of this policy to:

- alleviate poverty;
- support vulnerable young people in the transition to adult life;
- safeguard residents in their own homes;
- help those who are trying to help themselves;
- keep families together;
- support the vulnerable in the local community;
- helping people through personal and difficult events

It is therefore not the intention to restrict assistance to any specific groups, an impact assessment has been completed to identify if there were any groups that would be disproportionately affected within the proposed scheme.

Leicester, like most other local authorities, will be undertaking ongoing monitoring and reporting following its introduction to assess demand both in the numbers of applications and the type of requests made.

8. What is the budget allocation you have received for the next financial year for your replacement Social Fund scheme – and what administration fee the Government is also providing?

Our budget allocation for next financial year for Social Fund scheme is £16,068 set up costs, £1,606,825 programme funding for 2013/14 and £339.534 admin funding for 2013/14

These figures are taken from <http://www.dwp.gov.uk/docs/social-fund-settlement-funding-allocation.pdf> Programme (AME), Administration (DEL) and Set-up funding allocation by country and local authority (DWP)

9. How many people are affected by the so called ‘bedroom tax’ new under occupancy rules for Housing Benefit?

Of those identified as having one extra bedroom, 2,124 Local Authority tenants will be affected and our current figures show 1,069 Registered Social Landlord tenants will be affected.

Of those identified as having two or more extra bedrooms, 629 Local Authority tenants will be affected and our current figures show 193 Registered Social Landlord tenants will be affected.

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If you are dissatisfied with the handling of your request please write to:

**Information Governance Manager
Information and Support
Leicester City Council
FREEPOST (LE985/33)
New Walk Centre
LEICESTER LE1 6ZG**
e-mail: info.requests@leicester.gov.uk

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Information Commissioner's Office

Wycliffe House

Water Lane

Wilmslow SK9 5AF

Telephone: 01625 545 700

www.informationcommissioner.gov.uk

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