

Family Support and Complex Families

Family Help Material Support Fund Policy and Procedure

September 2018 (updated May 2021)

1. Introduction

This policy and procedure is for Family Early Help staff looking to offer material support (for example services, purchased equipment or items or other methods of material assistance) to families open to the Family Early Help Service.

Material assistance can be offered to a child or other person in their family within the parameters set out in this policy.

2. Support Fund Budget

Each service in Family Support and Complex Families – e.g. FIF, TT, FSEH and EHC – is allocated £2000 as a Material Support fund in each financial year.

Service managers have overall responsibility for the management of their service's Material Support Fund, and are responsible for oversight and forecasting of it on the Council's financial monitoring systems. Service managers have discretion to increase the Material Support fund for their service, if there is sufficient budget available to them in their cost centre.

This is a discretionary, non-mandatory fund and is different to the Children's Safeguarding and Social Work (CSSW) 'Providing Services Under Section 17' policy. The latter policy is informed and proscribed by the Children's Act 1989 section 17 requirements, and is intended to support families who are open to CSSW only.

There are annual ceilings for material support for families, which are set out in section 6.

3. Eligibility

Requests for material support will be considered:

- for families open to a Family Support and Complex Families service and families on an open Early Help Referral Decision (EHRD) in the Children and Families Contact Service AND
- if an early help assessment or EHRD shows that the child or any other person in their family is need of material assistance that would improve the welfare of the child/ren and enable progression towards the family's early help plan and goals.

This policy does not apply to families open to CSSW, who are covered by the 'Providing Services Under Section 17' policy. If a family worker is working with a family also open to social care, they should liaise with the social worker about material assistance for the family.

If there are concerns about whether threshold has been met for statutory social work intervention and s17, FSCF staff must refer to Camden threshold documents and attend Daily Discussion as per usual procedure (see Guidebook here <https://ascpractice.camden.gov.uk/early-help-guide/family-early-help-covid-guidebook/fscf-procedures-during-covid/stepping-up-escalation-procedures/>)

4. Assessment/EHRD

As part of the early help assessment process, family workers should ensure that:

- The early help assessment and plan, or EHRD casenote, are explicit in how provision of material assistance will help progress the family's goals, improve the child/ren's welfare and/or meet the child/ren's identified needs
- The family are receiving, or have applied for, all benefits or tax credits they are entitled to, and family workers should help families to undertake a welfare rights check to maximise their income (see Guidebook section here <https://ascpractice.camden.gov.uk/early-help-guide/family-early-help-covid-guidebook/legal-debt-welfare-and-other-advice/camden-welfare-rights-team/>)
- The Council's Welfare Assistance Fund cannot provide the material assistance required (see Guidebook <https://ascpractice.camden.gov.uk/early-help-guide/family-early-help-covid-guidebook/finance-bills-and-financial-hardship/welfare-assistance-fund/#main>)
- All other avenues for provision of material assistance have been explored. Family workers should consider all community resources available, and advise and support families on accessing those resources. This should include applying to charities or foundations on a family's behalf (see Guidebook here <https://ascpractice.camden.gov.uk/early-help-guide/family-early-help-covid-guidebook/finance-bills-and-financial-hardship/grants-from-charities-trusts-and-foundations/#main>)

Family workers should also be aware of any patterns of previous payments or material assistance to the family. Where there are repeated requests for emergency financial assistance, it may be necessary to carry out a more in-depth assessment of the family's circumstances, with support from a welfare rights specialist, in order to provide more appropriate services to support them.

Family workers should refer to the 'Assessments and Plans' guidance on the Family Early Help Guidebook for guidance on carrying out assessments, and developing and reviewing plans <https://ascpractice.camden.gov.uk/early-help-guide/family-early-help-covid-guidebook/fscf-procedures-during-covid/assessments-and-plans-guidance/#main>

5. Types of Assistance

5.1 Assistance in Kind

Assistance in kind is where Family Early Help buys in services, vouchers or items from suppliers on behalf of families. Assistance in kind should be used wherever possible; cash should not be provided.

5.2 Subsistence

When considering whether to provide an emergency payment for subsistence, family workers should:

- ensure that the service user has approached the Benefits Agency and the Camden Welfare Assistance Fund first and have been refused help **or**

- that the Benefits Agency is closed **or**
- benefit has been lost or stolen (parents should provide a police crime report before any payment is made).

In the case of supermarket vouchers, these should be calculated on the basis of free school meal funding levels (£15 per week per child). Supermarket vouchers are intended as a crisis solution only and should not be used long-term (e.g. beyond 3 months).

5.3 Clothing, utilities and other household items

Provision of any clothing, utilities and household items must be linked to an assessed need of the child/ren or family, and where parents need help in providing basic items. Parents should be encouraged to seek financial support for these items from other sources, for example the Benefits Agency. Wherever possible, payments should be via vouchers or purchase orders and paid directly to the supplier.

This category includes, but is not limited to:

- Baby equipment or toys
- Clothing or shoes
- Bedroom furniture
- Kitchen equipment or appliances
- Carpet, laminate or other flooring
- Paint

5.4 Direct work with children

Costs relating to direct work with the child/ren can be authorised, but only where the work clearly supports the child or family's early help plan and goals. Family workers must obtain written authorisation from their managers and be able to produce receipts for expenditure.

5.5 Transport

Assistance with transport costs can only be paid in support of the child's/family's early help plan, for example to help parents with extra costs of attending meetings, therapy or health assessments, or in cases of emergency where the child/ren needs to be taken to a place of safety.

If material assistance to support school attendance is sought, TFL free or discounted travel for school transport should be explored in the first instance. If that route has been exhausted, advice should be sought from the child's school and the Council's school transport team for a longer-term sustainable solution. Provision of any material support for transport from this Fund must be time-limited and not as a long-term solution (e.g. not beyond 3 months).

Travel warrants should be used wherever possible, although cash may be given for other forms of public transport where this is a cheaper alternative.

5.6 Accommodation Costs

The Material Support fund should not be used for accommodation costs, for example where a family is intentionally homeless or where a family is fleeing domestic violence. This is because in these circumstances, the family are likely to meet threshold for social work support and s17 material assistance and/or additional housing support from Housing Needs. Service managers have discretion for accommodation costs but should discuss the situation with social work managers and Housing Needs managers first.

5.7 Holidays and school trips

Cost of holidays and school trips should be explored with the child's school in the first instance to identify if costs can be reduced for the family. Costs of holidays should be explored through charitable organisations and foundations first. Service managers have discretion to pay for the cost of one-off holidays or school trips, but these are likely to be in extraordinary or exceptional circumstances only. Where a service manager authorises a payment for holidays or school trips, payments should be made directly to the supplier.

5.8 Homecare, day care, nursery or wraparound support

The Material Support fund is unlikely to be used for homecare, childcare, day care or nursery provision, and family workers should ensure they work closely with colleagues in Integrated Early Years Service to ensure pre-school aged children have access to any and all free nursery provision in line with their legal entitlement.

If wraparound support for school age children is required (for example breakfast club or after school club), this should be sought through the Play Referrals Coordinator (currently Tara Curtis on Outlook), as early help has separate arrangements with the Play Service to access before and after school club provision. Please also refer to the discounted costs for school-age childcare on the Guidebook here <https://ascpractice.camden.gov.uk/early-help-guide/family-early-help-covid-guidebook/schools/wraparound-care-and-holiday-care/#main>

5.9 Young people aged 16-17 Presenting as Homeless

Some young people that are working with Family Early Help will be referred by agencies and voluntary organisations, or by Housing following the young person presenting as homeless.

These young people will be supported under the Homeless Young People's Protocol and will be assessed for accommodation and support under the protocol. Please talk with your line manager about support for young people in these circumstances.

5.10 Migrant families and families seeking asylum

Migrant families and families seeking asylum are generally supported materially by the Home Office and specifically under section 95, section 98 or section 4 material assistance support. They may also have no recourse to public funds. As these forms of support are intended to cover basic needs such as accommodation and subsistence, the Family Early Help Material Support fund should only be used in exceptional or extraordinary circumstances. Service managers have discretion in these circumstances, but are expected to ensure that family workers have supported and advocated for families to apply to the Home Office for the funds they are entitled to.

Migrant families and families seeking asylum can receive further support from their local authority under section 17 where children are assessed as having unmet needs other than

those relating to accommodation or basic financial support. Support can only be provided following a social work child and family assessment to identify the child's needs and an initial plan drawn up. Section 17 funds can only be accessed by families open to Childrens Safeguarding and Social Work service.

All unaccompanied children who are seeking asylum are automatically referred to their local authority for support and in Camden, LAC social workers will support these children. Contact the service manager for LAC in the first instance.

Family workers should also refer to the 'Supporting Migrant Families and Families Seeking Asylum' section of the Guidebook for further advice <https://ascpractice.camden.gov.uk/early-help-guide/family-early-help-covid-guidebook/migrant-families-families-seeking-asylum/>

6. Procedure

A family worker should complete an early help assessment and plan, or an EHRD, before they apply to the Material Support fund. Exceptions may be made if the worker has identified a 'quick win' during the course of completing the assessment or EHRD. These exceptions are at the service manager's discretion.

Authorisation for payments from each services' Material Support budget must be agreed at the relevant managerial level in advance. Authorisation levels are:

Amount per payment	Annual ceiling per family	Who Should Authorise
Up to £100	Up to £250	Team manager
Between £101 and £500	Up to £500	Service Manager
Over £500	Over £500	Head of Service

If a family worker wishes to apply for funds from their services Material Support Fund, they should:

- **Complete the Material Support application form.** This should be done in advance of payment and/or an order being made with a supplier.
- **Submit the application form to the relevant manager** (see above table) for signature. If the relevant manager is away from work (on annual leave for example), their service manager or the manager providing cover in their absence can sign the form. In the event that the Head of Service manager is away from work but their authorisation is required, the service manager can apply discretion and authorise in those circumstances.
- **Once approved:**
 - **casenote the application** made for material assistance, and upload the application form as an attachment on Mosaic.
 - **send the form to the relevant Information Support Officer** to make the purchase required using the Council's official purchase card or to arrange payment to the relevant supplier.