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Telephone 0808 808 0123

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# **Community Care Grants from the Social Fund**

# **THE FACTS**

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# Community Care Grants from the Social Fund

This factsheet is part of our **Benefits** range. It is written for people who are deaf. We use the term 'people who are deaf' to refer to people who are deaf, deafened or hard of hearing.

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If you'd like further copies of this factsheet, or if you'd like to receive it in large print, Braille or in audio format, please contact our helpline (see front page).

## What is the Social Fund?

The Social Fund provides grants and loans to people on certain social security benefits. It is run by Jobcentre Plus, part of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP).

If you are deaf and need financial help to live independently in the community, or to ease exceptional pressure on you and your family, you may be able to get a Community Care Grant from the Social Fund. You won't have to pay it back.

As well as Community Care Grants, the Social Fund can pay budgeting loans, crisis loans, maternity payments and funeral payments. This factsheet is about Community Care Grants only. For information about other payments from the Social Fund, read the Jobcentre Plus leaflet *The Social Fund (DWP 1007)*, which is available online from Directgov – see page 8 for more details.

## Important changes from April 2013

Community Care Grants and Crisis Loans for general living expenses (including rent in advance) will be abolished from April 2013 and replaced by new local provision. The new provision will be administered by local authorities in England and the devolved administrations in Scotland and Wales.

## What is a Community Care Grant?

A Community Care Grant is a discretionary award to help a person live independently in the community. 'Discretionary' means you won't get a grant automatically – you must meet certain conditions. Your local Jobcentre Plus office has a fixed budget for Community Care Grants each year. This means that the office is not allowed to make any more grants once its budget is spent.

Applications for grants are dealt with by Social Fund decision-makers, who are part of Jobcentre Plus. If you are awarded a Community Care Grant, you don't have to pay it back.

## What conditions do I need to meet to get a grant?

To be entitled to a grant, you must meet the following conditions:

- You must be receiving Income Support (IS), income-based Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA), income-related Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) or Pension Credit (PC); **or**
- Leaving institutional or residential care within six weeks and you are likely to receive IS, JSA, ESA or PC within six weeks, **and**
- You must need a Community Care Grant for a specific reason (see below), **and**
- You must not be applying for an 'excluded item' (see 'What *can't* I get a grant for?' on page 4).

Even if you meet these conditions, you may not be awarded a grant. Social Fund decision-makers have to take a lot of factors into account when deciding whether to award a grant. We'll tell you more about some of the qualifying conditions and how decisions are made later in this factsheet.

## When can a grant be awarded?

You may be awarded a Community Care Grant if the item or items you are applying for:

- help you, or a member of your family, to get established in the community after a stay in institutional or residential care
- help you to set up home in the community, as part of a planned programme of resettlement, after an unsettled way of life

- help you, or a member of your family, to stay in the community rather than go into institutional or residential accommodation to receive care. You don't have to be at immediate risk of going into care to qualify. But you need to show how a grant would improve your independence in the community and therefore reduce or delay the risk of you going into care
- ease 'exceptional pressures' on you and your family. Living on a low income is unlikely to be considered to be enough in itself. Examples of exceptional pressures could be the breakdown of a relationship; becoming deaf or a worsening of deafness; or coping with particular needs of children in the family – for example, difficulties in making the home safe for a disabled child
- help you to care for a prisoner or young offender on temporary release
- help you with travel expenses within the UK, in some circumstances (for example, if you have to visit a relative who is ill or in prison).

If you are deaf, you are likely to claim for a Community Care Grant to help you remain in the community or reduce exceptional pressures on your family.

## What **can** I get a grant for?

Examples include:

- Furniture and other items, such as cookers, beds, bedding, carpets or curtains when you set up home, or if you need to replace things that help you to live independently at home.
- Moving expenses – but you may have to explain why you need to move. For example, you may need to move closer to people who can give you support.
- Clothing and footwear; for example, if your condition causes excessive wear and tear on your clothes.
- Aids and adaptations, such as equipment to help you communicate in your home, which social services cannot provide (see 'What **can't** I get a grant for?' below).

This isn't everything you can apply for. If you need something specific, it's worth applying for a grant. But it's up to you to explain why your need for the item is important, and how it will help you to remain in your home or ease exceptional pressure on you or your family.

## What **can't** I get a grant for?

The rules say that you cannot apply for certain items ('excluded items'). You cannot get a grant for:

- a need that arises outside the UK
- education and training needs, including clothing and tools
- a distinctive school uniform, sports clothes or equipment for school use, travel expenses to and from school

- school meals taken during school holidays by children who are entitled to free school meals
- expenses related to court proceedings
- removal or storage charges if you are rehoused permanently by a local authority under certain circumstances
- domestic help and respite care
- medical, surgical, optical, aural (hearing) or dental items or services. This would include private hearing aids and private medical treatment
- work-related expenses
- debts to government departments
- investments
- telephone costs and charges, including textphones
- costs that local authorities must meet by law
- fuel costs and standing charges
- housing costs, including major repairs, rent, deposits, mortgage payments or water rates
- any repairs to the home if you are a local authority or registered social landlord tenant
- council tax
- daily living expenses.

If you are refused a Community Care Grant because the Social Fund officer says the item you are asking for is excluded, you should seek advice.

## How do I apply?

To apply for a Community Care Grant, you need to get form SF300 from the Directgov website, a Jobcentre Plus office, Citizens Advice or the Benefit Enquiry Line (see pages 8-9 for all contact details).

Estimate the cost of each item you are asking for. If you are applying for a grant to cover the cost of moving home or redecorating, you should get written quotations. Explain in detail how each item you need will enable you to live independently or ease 'exceptional pressures' on your family. It may be a good idea to ask a social worker with deaf people, or someone else who understands your needs, to write a supporting letter.

## How are decisions made?

The Social Fund department at your local Jobcentre Plus office is responsible for deciding whether your application is successful. Community Care Grants are discretionary, so you do not have an automatic right to payment.

Decision-makers have to follow national and local guidance and they prioritise Community Care Grant applications. The guidance states that people with sensory disabilities, including people with hearing loss, should be given priority.

## Decision priorities

Decision-makers should normally give:

- high priority to your need if a grant will have a substantial and immediate effect in resolving or improving your circumstances, and in meeting one of the purposes for which a grant can be awarded (see 'When can a grant be awarded?' on page 3)
- medium priority to your need if a grant will have a noticeable effect, although not substantial and immediate, in resolving or improving your circumstances and in meeting one of the purposes for which a grant can be awarded
- low priority to your need if a grant will have only a minor effect in resolving or improving your circumstances and in meeting one of the purposes for which a grant can be awarded.

## Other factors

Decision-makers must also take into account:

- the nature, extent and urgency of your need
- the existence of resources that could meet your need
- the district office budget
- the law governing the Social Fund
- national and local guidance
- whether any other person or organisation could meet your need. For example, the Social Fund officer will look at whether your local social services department has a duty to provide any aids or adaptations (for more information, see our factsheet *Social services for adults who are deaf*).

Every Jobcentre Plus district is given a fixed Community Care Grant budget each year, and isn't allowed to spend more than this. However, you shouldn't be refused a high-priority item just because of the local budget. In practice, you may find that your local office's priority list may be adjusted throughout the year, to help them manage their budget. For instance, if their budget is almost all spent, they may only be able to award a grant for high-priority items; or if they have more money in their budget, they may also pay a grant for medium-priority items.

## How much will I get?

That depends. The minimum amount for a Community Care Grant is £30 (except if the grant is for travel expenses). There is no set maximum amount. If you have savings of more than £500, or more than £1,000 if you or your partner are old enough to claim Pension Credit, any grant you get will be reduced by the amount that your savings exceed £500 or £1,000. If you are refused a grant for a specific item, you cannot apply for the same item for another 26 weeks, unless your circumstances change. You should therefore make full use of the review process.

## How do I challenge decisions and start the review process?

Unlike other social security benefits, you don't have the right to appeal to an independent tribunal if you disagree with a Community Care Grant decision. However, you do have the right to ask for the decision to be reviewed:

- You can request a review of a decision to refuse you a grant. Or, if you are allowed a grant, you can request a review of the amount you have been awarded. You must apply for a review of a decision by writing to the office where the decision was made and you should explain your reasons for asking for a review. You must do this within 28 days of the date the decision was issued to you.
- If you apply outside the 28-day time limit, Jobcentre Plus will only carry out a review if your application is late for 'special reasons'. 'Special reasons' are not defined but could include ill health, domestic crisis or wrong advice.
- Your case will usually be reviewed by a reviewing officer. You may be offered an interview to present your case in person. The reviewing officer must invite you for an interview if they don't think, on the basis of the papers, that they can review the decision completely in your favour. You can take someone with you, such as an adviser who can act as your representative.
- The reviewing officer can either confirm the decision of the decision-maker or revise it. You will then be informed of the result.

If you still disagree with the decision after the initial review process, you can ask for a Social Fund inspector to review the decision. Social Fund inspectors are based at the Independent Review Service (IRS) and are independent of the staff at Jobcentre Plus. You have 28 days from the date of the new decision to apply in writing. You can apply on Form IRS1, available from your local Jobcentre Plus, or in a letter. Late applications can be accepted if you have 'special reasons'. You will not normally have to go to a formal hearing, and if the inspector needs any more information, he or she will write to you. You should get help from an adviser if you want to take your case to a Social Fund inspector.

## Budgeting loans

If you cannot get a Community Care Grant for something you need, you could apply for a budgeting loan. Remember, however, that you have to repay budgeting loans through deductions from your benefit. For more information, see the leaflet *The Social Fund (DWP 1007)*, which you can get from your local Jobcentre Plus or online (see below).

## Where can I get further information?

If you have an enquiry about benefits, you should first contact the **Benefit Enquiry Line (BEL)**. If you need help filling in a form or want to speak to someone in person, contact the **BEL** or your local Citizens Advice Bureau. Alternatively, contact your local **Jobcentre Plus** office – staff may be able to arrange for a visiting officer to come and see you in your own home. If you need further help after contacting these organisations, please contact us (see front page for details).

### Benefit Enquiry Line (BEL)

A free advice and information line run by the Department for Work and Pensions for people who are disabled and their carers.

Warbreck House, Warbreck Hill Road, Blackpool, FY2 0YE

Telephone 0800 882 200

Textphone 0800 243 355

[bel-customer-services@dwg.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:bel-customer-services@dwg.gsi.gov.uk)

[www.direct.gov.uk/disability-money](http://www.direct.gov.uk/disability-money)

### Social Security Agency for Northern Ireland Benefit Enquiry Line

Telephone 0800 220 674 Textphone 0800 243 787

[www.dsdni.gov.uk/ssu](http://www.dsdni.gov.uk/ssu)

### Citizens Advice

Provides free advice – see your phonebook for your nearest bureau or search online at:

[www.citizensadvice.org.uk](http://www.citizensadvice.org.uk) (England and Wales)

[www.cas.org.uk](http://www.cas.org.uk) (Scotland)

[www.citizensadvice.co.uk](http://www.citizensadvice.co.uk) (Northern Ireland)

Alternatively, you can use the Citizens Advice online advice guide at [www.adviceguide.org.uk](http://www.adviceguide.org.uk)

### Directgov

A government website providing information about benefits and allowances. You can also find contact details for your local Jobcentre Plus office.

**Direct link for form SF300:** [www.dwp.gov.uk/advisers/claimforms/sf300\\_print.pdf](http://www.dwp.gov.uk/advisers/claimforms/sf300_print.pdf)

**Direct link for DWP leaflet *The Social Fund*:** [www.dwp.gov.uk/docs/dwp1007.pdf](http://www.dwp.gov.uk/docs/dwp1007.pdf)



## **Disability Rights UK**

Provides a range of information on benefits.

12 City Forum, 250 City Road, London EC1V 8AF

Telephone 020 7250 3222

Fax 020 7247 8765

[www.disabilityrightsuk.org](http://www.disabilityrightsuk.org)

[enquiries@disabilityrightsuk.org](mailto:enquiries@disabilityrightsuk.org)

## **Independent Review Service for the Social Fund (IRS)**

This service deals with reviews of Social Fund decisions and provides information about Community Care Grants.

4th Floor Centre City Podium, 5 Hill Street, Birmingham B5 4UB

Tel/textphone 0800 096 1929

Fax 0121 606 2172

[sfc@irs-review.org.uk](mailto:sfc@irs-review.org.uk)

[www.irs-review.org.uk](http://www.irs-review.org.uk)

## **Law Centres**

Law Centres provide free legal advice, casework and representation to individuals and groups.

All Law Centres specialise in social welfare law. You can find details of your local Law Centre from the Law Centres Network; visit [www.lawcentres.org.uk](http://www.lawcentres.org.uk)

## **Further information from Action on Hearing Loss**

We have a wide range of factsheets and leaflets on many aspects of hearing loss and tinnitus.

Contact our helpline (see front page) to find out more and to order free copies. Alternatively, you can download our factsheets and leaflets for free at [www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk/factsheets](http://www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk/factsheets)

## **Acknowledgement**

With thanks to Ken Butler from Disability Rights UK for checking and editing this factsheet.

## **We welcome your feedback**

If you have any comments or suggestions relating to this factsheet, please email

[reviewpanel@hearingloss.org](mailto:reviewpanel@hearingloss.org)

## **Action on Hearing Loss Information, October 2012**

### **This information will be reviewed and updated in October 2013**

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