

RESIDENT SUPPORT SERVICES FUND

Responsible Officer

Director Customer Services

Aim of the Policy

This document sets out the internal policy and procedure that is to be used when dealing with a resident who has asked for our assistance because of hardship or an unexpected event.

The Policy

Phoenix recognises that many of its prospective and existing residents are increasingly dependent on welfare benefits and because of this, many experience financial hardship. This is particularly so when an emergency or unexpected event occurs as many can find themselves unable to cope financially. In addition the cost of living crisis is having a unprecedented impact on the financial capabilities of households across the Phoenix Community.

Phoenix want to offer assistance in such circumstances where the resident is experiencing hardship and where the change in circumstances has had a detrimental effect on them or a member of their family's health or welfare. Priority will be given to those considered 'at risk' as defined in the Supporting Residents At Risk Policy.

Eligibility

Access to the fund is available to all tenants, prospective tenants and shared owners. However, priority will be given to those who are considered vulnerable and unable to assist themselves. Only one application can be made within a six month period, up to a maximum value of £750 per household, annually. It should be used as a last resort, when all other options have been explored.

Purpose of the fund

1. The purchase of everyday items which avoid undue hardship to the resident or members of their family living permanently with them;
2. The purchase of items which help to overcome day to day obstacles;
3. To purchase essential items which enable a prospective tenant to move into their new home;
4. To provide relief from a situation which is likely to affect the resident's health or welfare.

The application

Any Phoenix employee can apply on behalf of a resident to this fund; however they should discuss it with colleagues to ensure other possible sources of assistance have been considered and always involve the Housing Officer.

The Phoenix staff member should discuss the circumstances of the case with the applicant.

They should establish whether the resident:

- Has accessed all eligible welfare benefits;
- Has requested assistance from the relevant local support scheme;

- Has been offered any help from the relevant local support scheme;
- Has approached any other agency;
- Has received any assistance from another agency;
- Has a credit available on their rent account;
- Would benefit from a referral to a financial wellbeing advisor, energy advisor or any other agencies Phoenix works with (e.g. CAB, Pennysmart, credit union, Newcastle Furniture Scheme, foodbank, befriending scheme).

The Resident Support Services Fund should be seen as a last resort and only accessed where all other avenues have been exhausted. The Phoenix staff member should make the initial request on a Request for Resident Support Services Fund Payment pro forma.

The Fund

There is an upper limit of £750.00 per application. In exceptional circumstances the Director of Customer Services may consider a higher limit and such exceptions will be co-signed by another member of the Executive Team. Only one application may be made in a six month period. Applications will be assessed and processed by the Financial Wellbeing Manager or Head of Specialist Housing Services. A record of all applications received will be maintained along with the decision made and any committed funds accordingly.

Use of the Fund

It is anticipated that payments will be towards the cost of replacement items of furniture or to help with the purchase of essential items which might help a new tenant to move in and maintain their tenancy. In cases where furniture is to be purchased, it must first be established that Newcastle Furniture Scheme cannot provide the service under the scheme and is expected that these items will be second hand.

The fund is not intended to pay fuel bills and requests for this should be referred to the Credit Union for the emergency fuel loan.

Examples:

- Replacing cookers/fridges etc where Newcastle Furniture Scheme is not suitable;
- One-off clean where tenant has been unable to properly care for themselves;
- Assistance with fares to food bank, College etc.

Payment

Payments will be made directly to the supplier, at no time will cash (including gift vouchers), in excess of £10, be given directly to the Resident.

Monitoring and Review

The Responsible Officer will ensure that all requests and payments are held on a central file. Copies of all completed forms must be treated in line with the Data Protection Policy. Fund activity will be reported to the Executive team quarterly and to Board annually in the Income and Welfare Reforms Performance Report. The policy will be reviewed every three years or sooner whenever there are changes to legislation or good practice.

Reference to other documents and associated policies and procedures

Including:

- Vulnerability (“At Risk”) Strategy
- Data Protection Policy
- Connected Together Policy
- Resident Support Services Fund Procedure
- Request for Tenant Support Services Fund Payment Form

Definitions

Term/acronym	Description
Resident	Includes tenants and prospective tenants and shared owners.
Phoenix	Phoenix Community Housing.
Association	Phoenix Community Housing.

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