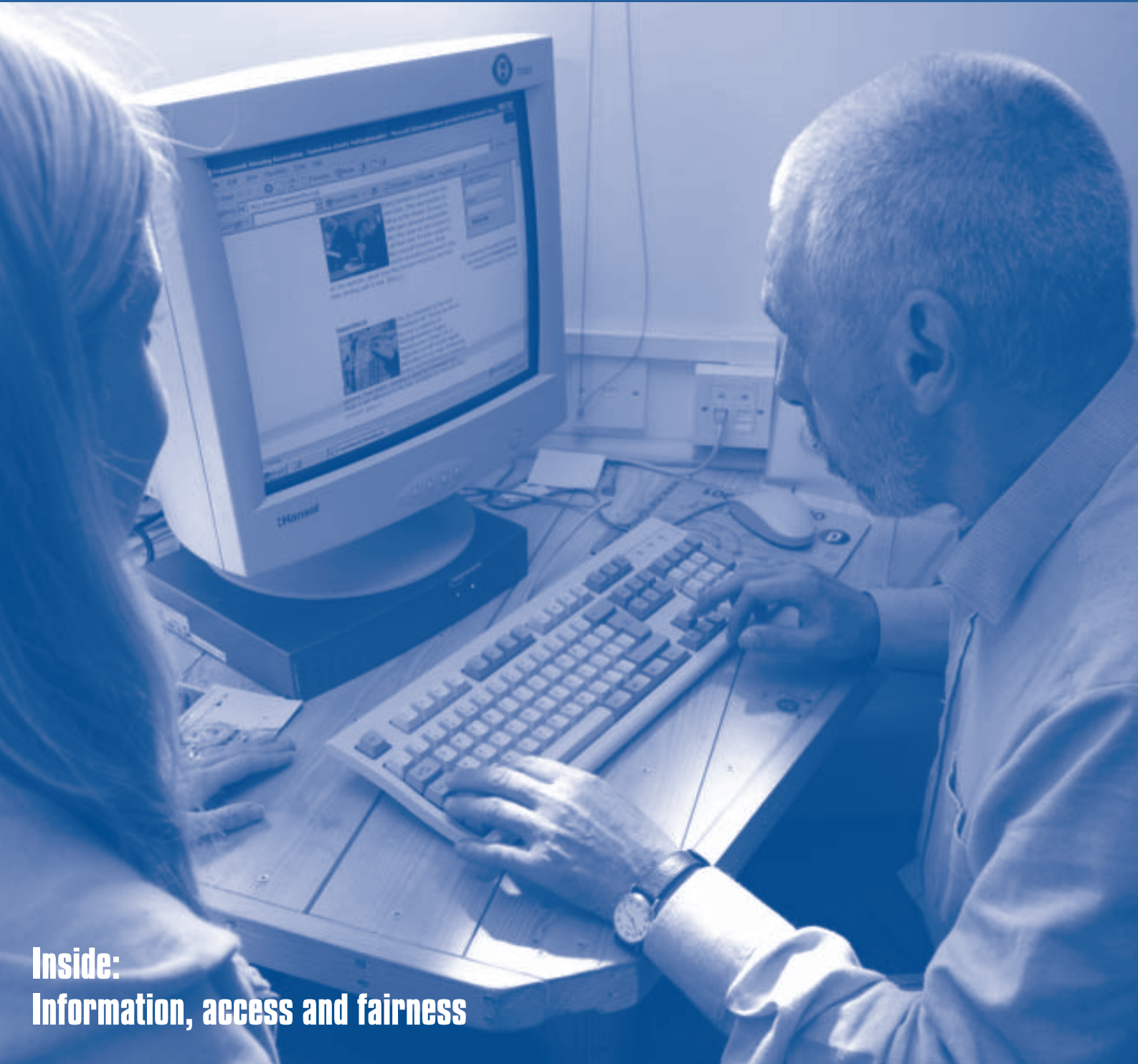


the Journal

and the Digest of Decisions

Issue 34 Summer 2006



**Inside:
Information, access and fairness**



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

irs

**Independent Review Service
for the Social Fund**

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EDITOR'S LETTER

Welcome to Journal 34.

In this edition we have covered the recent changes to the way you can request an independent review. The changes are highlighted in the article from Donna Bateman on page two. I hope you find this article informative. If you have any queries about the changes or have feedback on how the new arrangements are working please get in touch.

I would also draw your attention to the article on page ten. We often deal with queries from representatives and advisors about crisis loans. Some of the practices they describe concern us as they have no basis in law. The article on pages 10 and 11 outline some of the "myths" relating to crisis loans. Hopefully this article will be useful to advisors whose clients face some of these difficulties.

As usual please contact me if you have any feedback on the content of the journal or if you have any suggestions for future editions.



Natalie Penrose

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IRS Workshops for Jobcentre Plus Staff

For some time the IRS has delivered free workshops to Social Fund staff in Jobcentre Plus, Pension Service staff and advisor organisations.

Workshops for Social Fund staff are usually held at local Jobcentre offices. We will continue to offer these workshops and are still taking bookings.

In addition, we now hold all-day workshops at the IRS in Birmingham for people working in Jobcentre Plus. A series of all-day workshops have already been held at the IRS premises which attendees found very helpful. We already have a waiting list for future events.

Please see inside the back cover of this journal for more information on the workshops available and how to make a booking. Queries about workshops should be directed to **Linzi Cooke** on **0121 606 2191**. Workshop information and the ability to book on-line are both available on the IRS website at www.irs-review.org.uk

New Community Care Grant application form

We, at the IRS, have been concerned for some time that the initial decisions on Community Care Grant applications are too often based on inadequate evidence. The application form is the primary means of gathering evidence. Applicants and decision makers benefit from getting the right information as early as possible. We therefore recommended a redesign to improve capture of the information relevant to the issues that must be decided.

In his most recent annual report the Social Fund Commissioner referred to work the IRS has done alongside DWP to redesign the Community Care Grant application form. A draft of the new form is now ready and we would welcome your comments.

The form is available to view on the IRS website over summer 2006. Please send your feedback to **Lis Martin**. The IRS website address is www.irs-review.org.uk For more information please contact Lis on **0121 606 2204**.

Direct Applications

From 24th April 2006 people who are dissatisfied with the review decision that their local office has made can apply directly to the IRS. People can write to the IRS on the IRS1 leaflet or in a letter, using the Freepost address; **INDEPENDENT REVIEW SERVICE, FREEPOST** explaining why they want a review.

When we receive direct applications for an Inspector's review we will contact the relevant Jobcentre Plus office as a matter of urgency and arrange for all papers to be sent directly to us. As soon as we receive the papers the Inspector will contact the customer within 3 working days to set out the relevant issues in the case and ask any relevant questions.

For more information about direct applications please see the article on page two or call **Linzi Cooke** on **0121 606 2191**. Free copies of our leaflet IRS1, which explains the new way to apply for an Inspector's review, are available on our website. Or, alternatively they can be obtained from the IRS. Call **Brian Sigley** now on **0121 606 2155** for your free copies.





Applying for an Inspector's Review

Donna Bateman outlines important changes to the way customers can apply for an Inspector's review

On 24 April 2006, important changes were made to the regulations which govern the way people can apply for a Social Fund Inspector's review. Prior to this people who wished to apply for an independent review had to write to their local Jobcentre Plus office. The office would then send all the papers relating to the application to the Independent Review Service.

Now people can send their review requests directly to the Independent Review Service (IRS).

Why is this change so important?

We firmly believe that allowing people to apply for a review directly at the IRS will speed up the review process for people and should give people greater confidence in the integrity of the Inspector's review and its independence.

Speed of Service

We are committed to completing cases as soon as we can. We are conscious that our customers include some of the most vulnerable people in society who use our service when they are in urgent need. By the time a case reaches us, the second tier of the grievance process, a significant amount of time may already have passed since the application was first made. Our deadlines are correspondingly short – the majority of cases are completed within 12 working days.

The change will enable us to control cases from

the date we receive the review request until the Inspector makes a decision. It will enable us to pursue prompt dispatch of papers from districts to the IRS, ensuring the independent review begins at the earliest possible time. Before April 2006, we were unaware that someone had requested an Inspector's review until the case arrived from Jobcentre Plus and had no control over the length of time it took cases to arrive. We were concerned that the time taken for districts to send cases to the IRS could impact on people's view of the service the IRS delivers. They could not be expected, for example, to take into account the time taken for districts to send cases to the IRS.

During 2004-2005 cases took an average of 6 days to arrive at the IRS, 10% of cases took over 10 days. We recognise that this is too long for the majority of people who use our service.

Reinforcing independence

The independence of the Inspector's review is vital to the integrity of the process and we would always defend this vigorously. However, it is not enough for us to say that the review is independent. People who use our service also have to recognise, and believe in, its independence. It was clear to us from comments we saw in casework and in responses to our customer survey that some people believed the IRS is part of Jobcentre Plus rather than a separate organisation. This was fuelled, we believe, because applications for review

were made at the same office about whose decision people have a grievance.

Making applications for review directly to the organisation which is responsible for conducting that review underpins for us the integrity of the process and reinforces its independence as well as the necessary distinction between the Jobcentre Plus and IRS.

A guide to what the changes mean in practice

Applying for an Inspector's review

Applicants must still request an Inspector's review in writing. When they receive their decisions from the Reviewing Officer in Jobcentre Plus, they also receive a leaflet IRS1 - "How to ask for an Independent Review on Social Fund Grants and Loans". This has a tear-off section to complete to ask for the review.

Some people prefer to write a letter. This can be attached to the leaflet and sent to us, or sent on its own. The letter should include the person's:

- full name, address and telephone number
- national insurance number or date of birth
- reasons why he disagrees with the Reviewing Officer's decision
- contact details for his representative, if he has one, and whether he would like the paperwork sent to him or his representative.

The leaflet or letter should then be sent to the Independent Review Service. People need to use their own envelopes for this but do not need to use a stamp as postage is free. Our address for reviews is **INDEPENDENT REVIEW SERVICE, FREEPOST.**

People who contact districts to ask how to apply for an Inspector's review should also be given this freepost address.



What happens when the review request arrives at the IRS

On the same day we receive a request for an Inspector's review, we contact the relevant Jobcentre Plus office, either by phone or fax, and ask them to send all the case papers to us. After three days, if we have not received the papers from Jobcentre Plus, we contact the office again to establish whether or not they have sent the papers, and if not, the reason for the delay. We chase up papers at regular intervals after this until we receive them. Where papers are very heavily delayed, we will let the applicant know what is happening and why. People can phone us free on 0800 0961927 if they want to make sure we have received their requests or to check on the progress on their case.

As soon as we receive the case papers, the Inspector continues with the review and will write to the applicant within 3 working about their case.

What happens if a review request is sent to Jobcentre Plus instead of the IRS

The Jobcentre Plus office sends the review request and the case papers to the IRS. As soon as we receive these, the case is passed to an Inspector for review.

After the decision

Once the Inspector has made his decision, all the case papers are sent back to the relevant Jobcentre Plus office who are responsible for making any award. There is no change to this part of the process.

Managing the change

We have updated all our literature, including our posters and our website, www.irs-review.org.uk, to ensure that people are made fully aware of the changes.

This is a significant change and we are monitoring it closely to ensure it delivers what we expect and our processes meet our customers' needs. We are keeping information about the numbers of applications we receive and the time it takes for case papers to arrive from Jobcentre Plus after we have requested them. We will be feeding this information back to districts as part of our ongoing discussions to identify where further improvements can be made, and will report on this in the Social Fund Commissioner's Annual Report to the Secretary of State. In the meantime, if anyone has any comments or questions about the changes, they should contact me on **0121 606 2114** or dmb@irs-review.org.uk

Crisis loans for items

The Reader's Panel has asked for a new article on crisis loan applications for items. Lis Martin focuses on some of the more difficult aspects of these types of applications

Applications for crisis loans for items, such as furniture and clothes, have potential pitfalls for decision makers. This article highlights areas where Inspectors commonly see errors.

Eligibility

One of the eligibility criteria is set out in Direction 14. Under Direction 14 the applicant is eligible for a crisis loan if he is without sufficient resources for his immediate short-term needs. This term includes anything that he needs to pay for immediately, whether or not it will have long-term use or benefit.

All the applicant's immediate needs must be taken into account, not just those for which he may qualify for a crisis loan.

Qualification

Under Direction 3, an applicant's expenses qualify for a crisis loan if:

- he needs to meet those expenses in an emergency or as a consequence of a disaster; and
- a crisis loan to meet the expenses may prevent serious damage or a serious risk to his or his family's health or safety; and
- the crisis loan is the only means of preventing the serious damage or serious risk.

All these conditions must be met in relation to each expense in order for it to qualify for payment.

Common errors when dealing with qualification under Direction 3

- "Emergency" can sometimes be interpreted too narrowly. The common understanding of an emergency is of some sudden, unexpected event. But the term also extends to any very pressing need requiring immediate action or remedy, however it has arisen. Situations which could be anticipated, such as needing to replace something important that has simply come to the end of its useful life, can be an emergency.

Although at this stage the applicant does not have to show that anyone's health would be at serious risk, the need must be a pressing one in order to be construed as an emergency.

- "Serious risk to health" can be misinterpreted. The applicant does not have to show that someone's health or safety will probably be damaged, only that there is a risk of this. A risk is a chance or a possibility, rather than something that is more likely than not. However, there must be a realistic chance the person's health will be adversely affected. The conditions will not be met if the risk is so remote as to be negligible. Or, if it is a common risk that has not been increased by the applicant's present situation.

The risk to health or safety must be serious. That is, the risk should be of serious consequences. If the consequences would

be trivial, such as mere discomfort or inconvenience the qualifying conditions will not be satisfied.

On the other hand, the possible consequences do not have to be as serious as actual illness or a need for medical attention. A situation that risks significantly compromising someone's existing state of health may qualify. The consequence does not have to be felt immediately. A situation that, if not remedied, may have an adverse effect gradually over a period of time can still qualify.

Whether someone's health is at serious risk will depend on his individual circumstances. A person whose health is already fragile may be at risk of harm in a situation that would have little effect on a fit person.

- **The relationship between meeting the need and preventing damage or risk is sometimes not considered.** To qualify for a crisis loan the particular expenses applied for must have the potential to prevent an identified serious risk. Decision makers need to consider carefully the impact of each item requested on the risk to health or safety, even where the need for several items stems from the same emergency.

For example:

Miss D has two young children. She has had a chip pan fire. It has severely damaged the eye-level grill and all the controls of her cooker, the

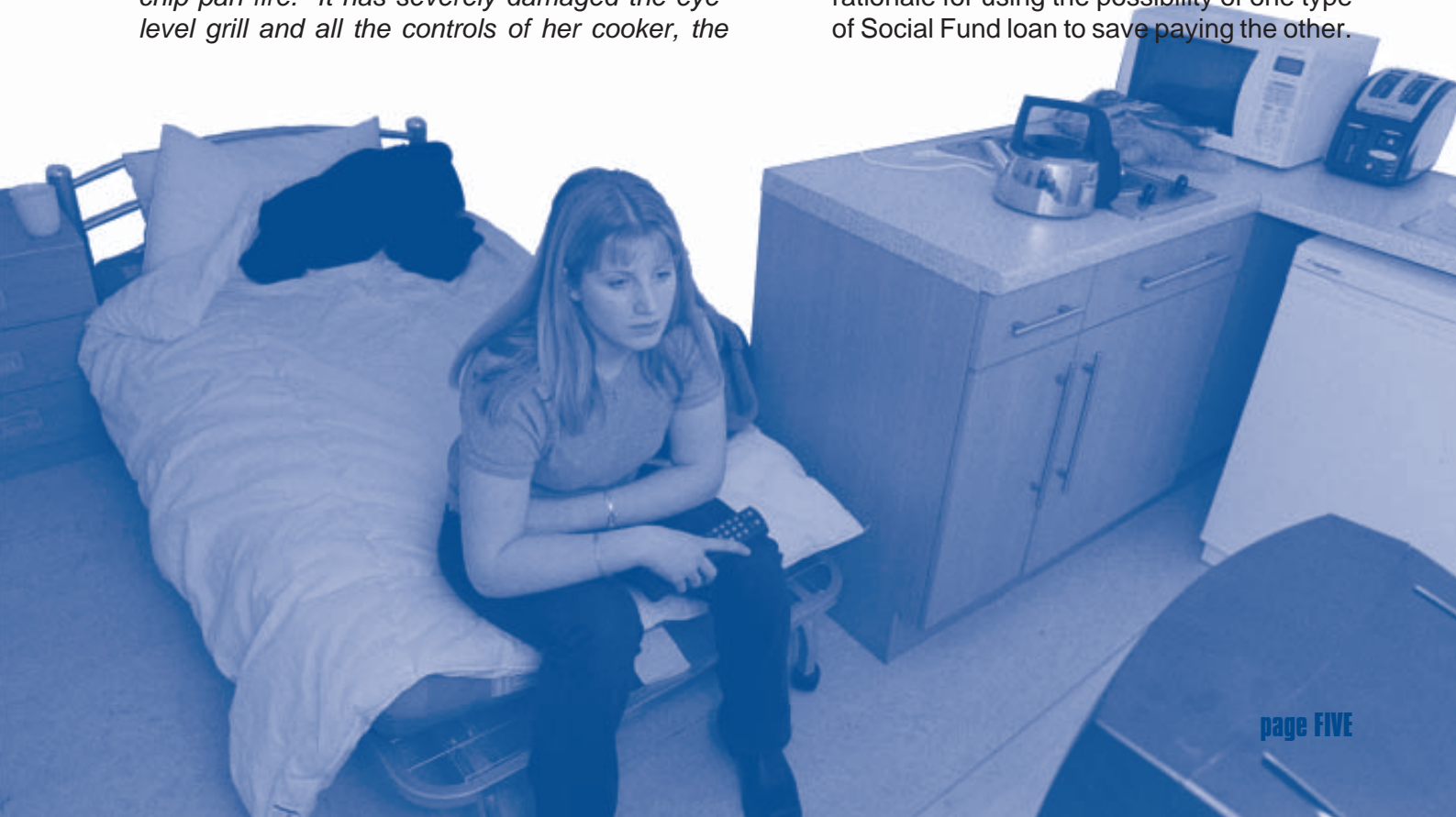
electric socket where the cooker is connected, the electric kettle that was plugged into the socket and the curtains that were adjacent to the cooker.

Miss D needs to meet the expenses of repair or replacement of all these items in an emergency. A crisis loan to ensure they have cooking facilities and a safe electricity supply may prevent serious risk to the family's health or safety. However, the absence of an electric kettle or of curtains is unlikely to have any impact on the family's health or safety.

- **Other means of meeting the need are sometimes not properly considered.** Other means can be money to meet the expenses, or any reasonable strategy the applicant could employ that may prevent the risk.

The decision maker bears the burden of proving that other means exist, and can be accessed quickly enough to deal with the emergency. He should not assume, for example, that the applicant's family will help. The evidence must show a balance of probability that this is the case.

If the applicant may be able to receive a budgeting loan, he should not be refused a crisis loan because this may be another means of meeting the need. The Social Security Act differentiates by providing that budgeting loans are to defray intermittent expenses and crisis loans are to meet immediate short term needs. There is no rationale for using the possibility of one type of Social Fund loan to save paying the other.



Amounts of Awards

Direction 21 restricts the amount that can be awarded to the lesser of:

- the cost of repairing an existing item; or
- the reasonable cost of replacing an existing item, or buying a new item (including delivery and installation).

The decision maker is under a duty to consider the possibility that an item can be repaired. However, care is necessary when deciding whether it is probable the item can be repaired and what that would cost.

Decision makers should not demand in the first instance that the applicant provides, for example, a report from an electrical repairer. In many cases it is possible to rely on other evidence, such as information the applicant can give about the age and condition of the item. If, having considered this evidence, it appears the item could be repaired for less than the cost of a new one, then it may be appropriate to ask the applicant to provide evidence of the cost.

If a broken item needs to be replaced or if the applicant needs something he has not owned previously, the operative word when deciding the amount is *reasonable*. The award should be enough to provide an item suitable for the individual's use, which will depend on his circumstances. It is not consistent with the principles of the Directions to award enough for an item with unnecessary or luxury features. But, this does not mean the appropriate amount is always the very least for which an item can be bought.

The direction expressly mentions delivery and installation. It may be necessary to check whether these are included in the amount the applicant has requested. A cooker, for example, is of no use unless it is fitted and working in the applicant's home. However, you cannot assume that the applicant needs delivery and installation for every item. As stated above, if there is not sufficient evidence on this point you need to check.

Crisis loans awarded on community care grant applications

Where a community care grant cannot be awarded, Direction 49 allows the decision maker to consider a crisis loan where the information supplied suggests it is appropriate to do so. This does not

imply that everything the decision maker might have awarded as a community care grant should be awarded as a crisis loan or vice versa. This is because the tests for the two types of payment are very different. All the conditions of qualification for a crisis loan must be met. In particular, the award for the specific expense must help prevent serious damage or a serious risk to health or safety.

For example:

Mrs E has applied for a community care grant she and her children are setting up home afresh in an unfurnished flat having fled domestic violence. She is not eligible for a community care grant because she is in receipt of Contributions Based Jobseekers Allowance.

If he were awarding a community care grant to ease exceptional pressures on the family, a decision maker might include items that would play an important role in easing the exceptional pressures on the family. However, when awarding a crisis loan he must be satisfied that each item could play a part in preventing serious damage or a serious risk to their health or safety.

More information about crisis loans:

- Commissioner's advice to Inspectors. The Commissioner has a range of advice on crisis loans.
- Crisis Loan Self Instruction Pack. This pack can be used by anyone with an interest in learning more on this subject.
- Crisis Loan Workshops. The IRS provide workshops on this subject, free of charge.
- Previous editions of the IRS Journal and Digest.

For more information on any of the above please access our website at www.irs-review.org.uk or call Lis Martin on **0121 606 2204**



Family Fund

What is the Family Fund?

The Family Fund is a registered charity covering the whole of the UK and is the only charity funded by the national governments of England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales.

It is the largest independent grant-giving organisation helping families with severely disabled children to have choices and the opportunity to enjoy ordinary life by providing timely grants based on the families views and needs.

Paul Nesbitt visited the Family Fund in York, to find out more. He also wanted to find out why many families apply to the Family Fund for help rather than the Social Fund, and vice versa.

Policy Officers Carolyn Harrison and Susan Wood explained:

“In some instances, if families with a severely disabled child received the help they are entitled to from the Social Fund, rather than the Family Fund having, it would allow us to provide more families with a wider range of help that is outside the remit of the Social Fund.”

Around 50,000 families applied to The Family Fund last year. The Fund has a budget of £30million per year – with around 90% of this distributed to some 45,000 eligible families.

Who may be eligible?

The Family Fund is open to families with children and young people aged 15 and under who have a severe disability

- The family must be resident in the UK;
- Families whose income is made up entirely from benefits are eligible for consideration;
- The Fund cannot usually consider applications from families with a gross income from employment or more than £23,000 per year;
- The Family Fund cannot help on behalf of children and young people in local authority care, including those living with relatives or foster carers.

In the majority of cases, families applying to the Fund for the first time receive a home visit. These visits are carried out by social or health workers,

who are contracted by the Fund to use their skills and expertise to assess the family's situation.

Some examples of the kind of things that the Family Fund helps with include:

- A washing machine to cope with extra changes of clothing and bedding;
- Specialist toys;
- Family holidays that everyone can enjoy together. These are great for stress relief;
- A trampoline for a young person with ADHD who needs to let off steam;
- A season ticket so a disabled child could go to see his local football team. This has helped the child enjoy life more and make new friends at the matches.



The Family Fund has also paid for pets. A horse has been purchased for a family so a severely disabled child could ride every day – it really helped with the child's development and gave the child a lot of enjoyment, and a new dog gave a young person help with learning independence skills, enabling them to get out and about by taking their new dog for walks.

However, the Family Fund cannot consider requests where there is a statutory responsibility to provide help or services.

The difference made by the Family Fund

The focus on families means that grants given by the Family Fund are designed with the needs of the whole family in mind. The grants can be for labour-saving devices such as washing machines and tumble dryers or for stress-relieving holidays. Families regularly tell the Family Fund that the reason they rate their services so highly is because the whole family benefits from the help provided and allows them all to enjoy ordinary life.

Driving lessons have been purchased for the non-driving parent. This makes a vast difference to the lives of families with a disabled child – meaning they can be transported to and from multiple appointments, sometimes at different hospitals, for example.

Freezers are essential for a family caring for a severely disabled child. Shopping can be both difficult and stressful if a family has a child in a wheelchair or the child's behaviour is difficult to manage. By empowering parents to drive, families need make fewer shopping trips but still have what they need at hand.

Why families may apply to the Family Fund rather than the Social Fund

Historically the Family Fund has not pushed people towards the Social Fund unless they have already been helped with a grant from the Family Fund within the year.

Some families apply to the Family Fund after trying to apply to the Social Fund, but with little or no success. Families have been told, verbally, that they cannot get "white goods" or other items via the Social Fund, or they are given a Crisis Loan application form rather than a Community Care Grant application form. Some families cannot get hold of the application forms and some offices do not accept the downloaded application forms from the Internet.

Some decision letters state the family 'can get what they need' from the Family Fund, and some Jobcentre Plus offices provide customers with the Family Fund application forms instead of giving a Social Fund Community Care Grant application form. Though this can be seen as good customer service, it is also seen as pushing customers to

claim, at the initial stage, from the Family Fund rather than the Social Fund, or to apply to the Family Fund rather than to ask for a review of their Social Fund decision.

The phrase “exceptional pressure” as used by the Social Fund in respect of Community Care Grants may deter some applicants from claiming. Families caring for severely disabled children live with these pressures everyday so they may not class them as “exceptional pressure” and so, they may not put these details on the form or they may not apply at all. Applying to the Family Fund may be less intrusive, as often less personal information is required when applying to the Family Fund rather than the Social Fund.

Some families find the process of asking for a review a very stressful experience and many feel that if they fall at the first hurdle then they do not see the benefit of asking for a review.

They sometimes feel that the Social Fund staff are not fully aware of the needs of families with severely disabled children, the pressure and stress they are under and the additional costs involved in caring for a severely disabled child.

Some families go to the Family Fund for a washing machine as they are provided with a 5-year warranty for items paid for by the Fund, rather than get help with buying a washing machine that is simply covered by a one-year manufacturer’s warranty. Families then know that they will have a reliable working machine for the next five years and this is vital when you have lots of additional washing because both your child/children are doubly incontinent.

Why customers may be better applying to the Social Fund and the benefit this would have for the Family Fund and their customers

About half of those who apply to the Family Fund are on Income Support. Applicants who receive a grant via the Family Fund cannot receive another for 12 months, unless there are exceptional circumstances. Where possible, life-threatening cases are turned around by the Family Fund in 48 hours. However, for a new family applying for a first time in can take up to four or five months for the application to be decided. 60% of first applicants re-apply to the Family Fund.

If families need urgent help with the basics of everyday living, such as a replacement bed or

mattress where there is severely incontinent child, or where a family needs help for a child who needs overnight tube feeding – then the Social Fund is likely to be a speedier option.

Many customers apply to the Family Fund for beds, bedding, mattresses, replacement floor covering, fridges, freezers, washing machines and tumble dryers – all which have a huge, benefit when caring for severely disabled children. These and other items may well be awarded as Community Care Grants.

Possible ways of improving Social Fund access to potential customers currently dealt with by the Family Fund

The Social Fund staff who work on evidence gathering, decision makers, reviewing officers and Inspectors need to have more disability awareness. They need more understanding of the affects of caring for a severely disabled child and the pressures, costs and stress this brings.

Links can be established between Jobcentre Plus and the Family Fund to help educate staff and thereby raise greater awareness.

The Family Fund is willing to do this by visiting offices and talking to staff about disabilities and their effects on families. If your office is interested contact:

Carolyn Harrison or Susan Wood at: policy@familyfund.org.uk

How families should apply to the Family Fund:

To apply to the Family Fund applicants must complete an a form, which can be found on www.familyfund.org.uk

Families can either apply on line, or download the form and send it by post.

If families do not have access to the Internet they should call **0845 130 45 42** or write, requesting a form to:

**Family Fund
Unit 4 Alpha Court
Monks Cross Drive
Huntington
York.
YO32 9WN.**

Crisis Loan myths

Do you have to be in receipt of benefit to claim a crisis loan? Do crisis loan applications have to be made over the telephone? In this article we separate the fact from the fiction.

Jim Davies-Shuck, Paul Nesbitt and Linzi Cooke present IRS workshops to a range of people with an interest in the Social Fund across Great Britain. Through our workshops we are made aware of common misconceptions about Social Fund law and operation. In this article Paul, Linzi and Jim set out the correct position on a range of crisis loan issues of particular interest to Journal readers.

Myth

You must be in receipt of benefit to claim a Crisis Loan.

Fact

Anyone can make an application for a crisis loan. Jobcentre Plus offices should accept an application form from anyone who wishes to apply. These should be processed, and a formal, written, decision should be issued.

The eligibility conditions for a crisis loan do not require the applicant to be in receipt of benefit. You are eligible for a crisis loan if you are aged 16 years or over and you do not have sufficient resources to meet your immediate short term needs (Direction 14), regardless of whether or not you are on benefit. You must also meet the appropriate qualifying conditions – you must need to meet the expenses in an emergency, and the crisis loan must be the only way of preventing a serious risk to your or your family's health or safety (Direction 3). For more information on crisis loan eligibility and qualification conditions please visit our website www.irs-review.org.uk

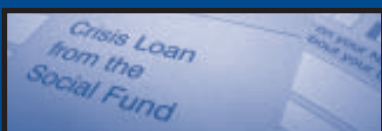
Myth

You cannot apply for more than one crisis loan (CL) for the same period of time. It would be a repeat application, which could not be paid.

Fact

Direction 7 prevents applications for the same items or service made within 26 weeks of the initial application from being considered, unless there has been a relevant change in circumstances since the first application. If there has been a relevant change of circumstances, then another CL can be considered.

For example, an applicant applies for a crisis loan because he has lost his money, and is given an award. This money is then stolen, and the applicant then makes another application for the same period of time. The fact that an award was made and then this was stolen is a relevant change of circumstances, so the second application could be considered. Whether an award would be paid would depend on the circumstances of the case.



Myth

You can only apply for a Crisis Loan for living expenses following loss or theft of money after you have reported it to the police, and you have a report number to confirm this.

Fact

There is no legal requirement to obtain a police report when making a crisis loan application.

A police report number is evidence only that the applicant has been to the police station. It does not prove that any loss or theft of money has occurred or that it has not. While a decision maker can look at the presence of a police report as part of the evidence in an application, the decision certainly should not hinge on its presence.

Myth

You may only apply for a crisis loan by telephone

Fact

The regulations changed in 2004 to allow crisis loan applications to be made in writing or by telephone. This reflects the fact that people applying for crisis loans are often in emergency situations, and telephone applications can often result in a speedier outcome.

However, Jobcentre Plus offices should also always accept written applications for crisis loans, as well as faxed and downloaded application forms.

Myth

Jobseekers Allowance (JSA) applicants must have attended a Work Focused Interview (WFI) before they can be considered for a CL (A WFI is the first stage of the application process for Jobseekers Allowance).

Fact

Anyone, who is aged 16 years or over and is without sufficient resources to meet his immediate short term needs, is eligible to apply for a CL. This could even include someone who is currently in employment. There is no legal requirement for an applicant to have attended a WFI before being considered for a crisis loan, any more than there is a requirement for an applicant to be on any form of benefit.

Myth

You cannot get any help with living expenses if you already have a Social Fund debt of £1500.

Fact

You cannot receive a further Social Fund loan if you already owe £1,500 to the Social Fund as this is the maximum level of debt permitted by the legislation. However, it may be possible for you to receive a community care grant to help you in your crisis. To get a grant in this situation, you would need to be receiving a qualifying benefit (Income Based Jobseekers Allowance, Income Support or Pension Credit) and also meet the qualifying conditions for a grant. If so, you may be able to receive a grant for living expenses.

Please note that this circumstance, where the applicant already owes the maximum to the Social Fund, is the only circumstance in which a grant could be considered for living expenses.

We hope that this article has given you an insight into some areas of misinformation that exist regarding the Social Fund. If you are experiencing any problems like this or similar, please let us know. If you would like more information on any area of the Social Fund and its review system, we offer free workshops to welfare rights organisations, front line benefits staff and Social Fund teams alike. If you are interested, please contact our colleague **Lorraine Moran** on **0121 606 2141** or **Lmm@irs-review.org.uk** You may also like to access our website at: **www.irs-review.org.uk**

Your Feedback Counts

The IRS deals with over 20,000 cases from across Great Britain each year. This puts us in a unique position to feedback to the Jobcentre Plus on trends and common areas of difficulty.

To help improve front-line standards we provide formal feedback to managers working in Jobcentre Plus and also provide a range of training and support for Decision Makers.

We include in our feedback to Jobcentre Plus any information we gather on the problems customers face when accessing the Social Fund. Some examples of common types of feedback are:

- Did the Jobcentre Plus provide helpful information about applying to the Fund?
- Was it easy to apply to the Social Fund? e.g. were application forms easy to obtain?
- Were you able to get through on the phone to make a crisis loan application?
- Did you experience any delays?
- Was the review process easy to follow?
- Were the decisions you received from Jobcentre Plus easy to understand?
- What was your experience of the Inspector's review?

To help us gather information on the customer's experience the Social Fund Commissioner holds regular meetings with advisors and representatives across Great Britain throughout the year. This is your opportunity to talk to the Commissioner directly about the issues that impact on you and your clients.

If you would be interested in attending a meeting of this type or if you have feedback that you would like us to raise on your behalf please contact **Richard Plant** on **0121 606 2122**. Or, alternatively email him at **rpp@irs-review.org.uk**

Workshops, Workshops, Workshops.

Are you a decision maker, a reviewing officer or a Social Fund Manager? Would you like to be trained at the IRS by a Social Fund Inspector?

If so please contact us urgently to book a place on 2006/07 workshop programme. All places are free of charge. All of the following courses take one day and will be held at the IRS in Birmingham.

Call us now on **0121 606 2204**,
or go to www.irs-review.org.uk for more information

IRS workshop programme: October 06 – March 07

Basic introduction to Social Fund

17 October 2006
24 January 2007

Evidence

26 October 2006
1 February 2007

Direction 4 Masterclass

5 October 2006
13 December 2006

Crisis loan Masterclass

11 October 2006
16 January 2007

Priority, Budgets and Amounts to award

1 November 2006
6 February 2007

Reviewing Officer Workshop

7 November 2006
13 February 2007

Social Fund manager workshop

21 November 2006
1 March 2007

Good Social Fund Customer Practice

29 November 2006
7 March 2007

Dealing with Social Fund Trouble Spots

5 December 2006
13 March 2007



If you would like to contact us:

Independent Review Service



eMail: sfc@irs-review.org.uk

Website: www.irs-review.org.uk



Phone: 0121 606 2100

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Statistical and other information about Social Fund Inspectors' reviews in Northern Ireland are available from:
Office of the Social Fund Commissioner. Scottish Amicable Building, 11 Donegal Square South, Belfast. BT1 5JE
Freephone: 0808 127 0417 **Fax:** 0280 9023 0921 **eMail:** sfc@osfcni.org.uk **Website:** www.osfcni.org.uk

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