VOCAL Edinburgh Carer Assistance Fund

Guidance Notes

1. **General information**

VOCAL Edinburgh has received funds from the Scottish Government to support unpaid carers who are experiencing financial difficultly, due to the ongoing impact of the COVID pandemic and the pressures of their caring role and are unable to access funding from alternative sources. This additional funding will expand support for adult and young carers, including those looking after disabled children and people with mental health conditions or addictions.

VOCAL Edinburgh have set up several funds’ carers can apply for using one form. These funds are set out below. Funds will be targeted at those in greatest need, particularly those on low incomes or supporting large households or who are in crisis (see Section C). The amount awarded will be determined by VOCAL and the decision will be final. Grants do not have to be repaid.

1. **What can be funded?**

These are a fuel fund, a food fund and a general recovery fund. The fuel fund can pay money directly to your energy provider to assist with gas and/or electricity bills. The food fund can supply you with food vouchers from a local supermarket.

The general recovery fund allows you to apply for a specific product or item, or more than one, such as white goods, basic furniture and furnishings and costs associated with caring or finding employment. This may include providing funds to obtain sitter services, personal hygiene and continence products, clothing, costs of setting up Power of Attorney/Wills or the purchase of specialist equipment such as an Alexa, Echo Show or household alarms.

VOCAL is keen to be as responsive as possible when allocating funding and will make every effort to ensure that the funds can be used in a way which provides the maximum benefit to the carer and the person(s) they care for. However, applicants do not need to restrict themselves to these examples and we encourage carers to be as creative as possible when considering what would help them most in their caring role.

Grant awards will range from £250- £500 and are available to carers in greatest need. It is possible to make two applications to the fund but there must be at least six months between applications.

1. **Who can apply?**

The fund is open to all unpaid carers, including adult, young and parent carers. VOCAL are keen to support as many carers as possible, but applicants must meet the following eligibility criteria:

* The carer must be an unpaid carer - A carer is someone who provides unpaid care to a family member, partner, relative or friend who needs help to manage a long term condition, disability, physical or mental health condition or addiction.
* The carer must be registered with VOCAL Edinburgh or be willing to register with VOCAL if they have not already done so.
* The support required should complement, and not replace or duplicate, services which local authorities, the NHS and other agencies already fund or provide.
* The application must be endorsed by someone who has supported the carer and/or the person they care for in a professional capacity e.g. a GP, District Nurse, OT, Social Worker, CPN, Carer Support Practitioner, Teacher, Community Worker.
* Carers must demonstrate why they are in need of a grant, for instance, due to low income or because of low health and wellbeing of the carer or the person receiving care or because relationships are under strain.
1. **Priority**

The focus of this fund will primarily be on hardship and improving financial wellbeing and we will seek to target those carers in greatest need. By ‘greatest need’ we mean carers at greatest risk of isolation, exclusion or disadvantage, whose caring role and lack of support may impact on their:

* physical, emotional and mental health and wellbeing
* ability to balance the caring role with a life of their own
* financial wellbeing and ability to afford basic necessities
1. **Desired Outcomes**

The support should help to achieve at least one or more of the following outcomes:

* The carer will benefit from improved physical and emotional wellbeing.
* The carer will be better able to sustain their caring role.
* The carer will benefit from improved financial wellbeing.
* The carer will be more confident dealing with the impact of the caring role on their relationships.
1. **Process for Completing Application Form**

As outlined above, all applications should include the name and contact details of one supporting professional. The role of the supporting professional is to confirm the description of the caring role is accurate and that support from the fund would be of benefit to the carer and/or the person receiving care. We also expect supporting professionals to say why they are supporting the application and how their organisation has supported the carer or the person they care for previously. **Applications without a statement from a supporting professional will not be considered.** Carers who are not in direct contact with a professional can call VOCAL and ask for help with this.

The Carer Support Practitioner will check the eligibility criteria to ensure the carer qualifies for the support that is available, before helping the carer to complete the application form. This will involve checking the carer’s circumstances against the criteria outlined in section C

& D above, while also ensuring other or more specific funding streams have been considered or explored in the first instance.

All applications must be signed or agreed by **the carer**. In signing or agreeing the form the carer is consenting to the sharing of all the information contained in the form with VOCAL’s Funding Panel, Shared Care Scotland and any other funders supporting the fund. In addition, by signing or agreeing the form the carer is confirming that the information they have provided is accurate and correct and evidence of agreed spend will be provided by **31st March 2022**.

A VOCAL Edinburgh Funding Panel will meet on a weekly basis to consider applications and make the final decisions on awards. The outcome of applications will be communicated to carer and/or their supporting professional within seven days of the funding panel meeting.

1. **Payment of Grants**

The type of payment will depend on the funds that have been applied for. The food fund will be paid in supermarket vouchers whilst the fuel fund will make a payment directly to carers energy providers.

For applications to the general hardship fund, payment will be made directly to the carer who would then purchase the agreed item(s) and return receipts within a specified timescale. Successful applicants will be paid by bank transfer or cheque, and bank details are asked for on the form if the carer prefers bank transfer. Bank details will also be stored securely by VOCAL’s finance department.

1. **Data protection**

Carers applying for the fund should be willing to share their information with VOCAL staff members, Edinburgh Health & Social Care Partnership, Shared Care Scotland and any other funders supporting VOCAL’s Recovery Fund.  Wherever possible, VOCAL will anonymise information and not share personal information with a third party unless required to do so (eg. with the Scottish Government to contribute to the Carer Census (Carers (Scotland) Act 2016), or with your consent.

The information provided on the form is stored on VOCAL’s secure online carer system.  We will use it to contact you to provide you with individual carer support and let you know about events, training and other opportunities relevant to your caring situation by email, post, SMS or phone if these details are provided. Information is regularly checked to ensure accuracy.  If carers wish to view the information we hold about them or if they wish their details to be removed, they can contact VOCAL on 0808 196 6666. VOCAL’s full privacy policy is available online at [vocal.org.uk/about/privacy/](https://www.vocal.org.uk/about/privacy/).