SAXON WEALD

FINANCIAL SUPPORT FUND POLICY

First Approved: January 2022 **Author: Kath Hicks**

Last Revision: January 2025 **Next Review: January 2028**

1.0 Introduction

1.1 We allocate funds in the budget annually to the Financial Support Fund (FSF). The fund aims to provide targeted financial support to Saxon Weald customers who are in crisis or financial hardship.

1.2 The fund is administered by the Money Matters team, which is part of the wider Housing Management team, and is best placed to identify those most in need and make assessments for eligibility.

1.3 The aim of this policy and its supporting procedure is to ensure there is transparency and probity in the allocation of the fund so that it is used fairly and, where possible, supports those most in need.

1.4 Applications for the fund will be accepted from Saxon Weald tenants, shared equity owners and shared owners.

2.0 Regulatory requirements

2.1 The provision of direct financial support is not a regulatory requirement, but the Regulator for Social Housing's Tenancy Standard requires housing associations to develop and provide services that will support tenants to maintain their tenancy and prevent unnecessary evictions.

3.0 Policy and implementation

3.1 <u>Ensuring the fund reaches those most in need</u>
We will use data on levels of financial vulnerability to proactively reach out to households who may benefit from help.

3.2 <u>Applications</u>
Applications can be made directly by customers or following a referral from a member of Saxon Weald staff. We will also consider referrals from external organisations such as Citizens Advice Bureau, social services or schools.

3.3 Details of how to apply are set out on our website or can be provided by contacting us. We will provide support for applications where required or requested.

3.4 Eligibility criteria and use of the fund
The fund is available to help support any Saxon Weald customer experiencing a crisis or financial hardship. Examples include, but are not limited to:

- Those moving into a new home
- Those on low incomes
- A bereavement
- A medical emergency or health condition
- A change to financial circumstances (for example losing a job)

We are not prescriptive about what the fund should be used for, recognising that everyone is different, with different needs and circumstances. As a general principle, however, payments will not be made towards rent or for rent arrears unless there are exceptional circumstances.

3.5 Transparency and fairness
We have an application/assessment tool to ensure that the funds are awarded fairly and where they are most needed. The criteria for allocations of the fund are provided to applicants and published on our website.

3.6 Control and monitoring
To ensure controls are in place, the assessment and approval process is separated between:

- Assessment and proposed award - made by a member of the Money Matters team.
- Review and approval of award - made by a Manager in the housing team.

A report on how the fund has been distributed will be brought to Executive Team and Board annually.

3.7 Maximum levels of awards
The following is provided as guidance for staff administering the fund.

3.7.1 Customers can apply for a maximum of £1,000 per household, over a 12-month period. There are limits to different areas of spending:

- Support with day to day expenses (food, clothing, transport) – max. six requests.
- Support with essential bills (heating etc.) – max. six requests.
- Support with purchasing furniture and white goods – max. one request.

3.7.2 During the winter months, priority will be given to customers who need support with fuel and food to ensure we are able to help as many customers as possible.

3.7.3 There may be exceptional circumstances that could result in higher payments, and these will be subject to approval by the Assistant Director – Housing.

3.8 Payments can be made through bank transfer or via vouchers. In exceptional circumstances we will consider directly purchasing goods or services on behalf of the customer.

3.9 Saxon Weald is committed to ensuring that disabled people are not disadvantaged in accessing its services and we will make reasonable adjustments for disabled people in the implementing of this policy.

3.10 In order to ensure fair and equal access to the support provided, we will use customer data to monitor that all customer groups are fairly represented. Where a group is identified as being under-represented, we will actively encourage promote the fund to that group.

4.0 Risk and risk mitigation

Risk	Impact	Mitigation
Those most in need do not access the fund	Customers in most financial difficulty do not access the fund	• Proactive use of data • Referrals from different sources, including self-referrals
Fund is under-used	Customers in most financial difficulty do not access the fund	• Proactive use of data • Referrals from different sources • Publicise fund directly to customers
Fund is insufficient to meet demand	Some customers are not able to access support	• Close monitoring of the budget • Ongoing review of criteria and awards of payments throughout the year • Some support available elsewhere (foodbanks, charities)
Inequality in the awarding of funds	Some households or groups are excluded	• Proactive use of data • Recording of E, D and I data • Separation of duties in the assessment and approval process

5.0 Data protection, information exchange and confidentiality

5.1 All information regarding the allocation of the fund will be dealt with in accordance with General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR). All information is stored securely and will not be disclosed unless the customer has given their consent or there is a clear duty to do so (for example, under an information sharing agreement with the police).

6.0 Value for money

6.1 We record all payments made through the fund, including monitoring the diversity of households and the reasons for awards.

7.0 Monitoring and review

7.1 We will use customer feedback and data to monitor the service and implement improvements.

7.2 This policy will be reviewed annually up until January 2025, after which it will be reviewed at least every three years to ensure that it reflects the needs of our customers, good practice, and changes to legislation or regulation.

8.0 Equality and diversity

8.1 Equality and diversity affect all aspects of our business and, as such, its principles are integral to everything we do. As a landlord and an employer, Saxon Weald aims to recognise and respond positively to people's differences, while providing equality of opportunity in relation to the services and careers we provide and support.

8.2 This means that no person or group of people, either working for Saxon Weald or seeking housing, services, employment or contracts from us, will be treated less favourably because of their or their partner's, family's, friend's or associated person's protected characteristics, which are: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race and ethnicity, nationality, immigration status, religion or belief, gender and sexual orientation. This includes individuals either already serving on or applying to join our Board.

8.3 To ensure that there is fair and equal access to the fund and that there is no unconscious bias in the assessment process, we will monitor recipients by household type, age, and protected characteristic.

Version	Amendment	By	Date
1.0	NEW POLICY	Kath Hicks ED Customer Operations	Jan 2022
2.0	Annual review	Laura Anderson Housing Operations Manager	Jan 2023
2.1	4.6 Removed floor coverings and changed timeline from 1 year to over a 12 month period	Lisa O'Neill Money Matters Manager	Jun 2023
3.0	Annual Review. 4.5 Amended reporting frequency to annually.	Laura Anderson Housing Operations Manager	Jan 2024
4.0	Annual review Several minor amendments including the inclusion of customer feedback.	Les Marjoram AD Housing	Jan 2025