

1st July 2013**Agenda Item: 8****REPORT OF SERVICE DIRECTOR FOR PROMOTING INDEPENDENCE AND
PUBLIC PROTECTION****PROGRESS REPORT ON THE NOTTINGHAMSHIRE WELFARE
ASSISTANCE FUND****Purpose of the Report**

1. To advise Members of the progress in the implementation of the Nottinghamshire Welfare Assistance Fund from 1st April 2013.

Information and Advice**Background**

2. The report of the Service Director for Promoting Independence and Public Protection to the Adult Social Care and Health Committee on the 29th October 2012 outlined the background to the transfer of responsibility for two elements of the Social Fund to the County Council, and recommended the procurement and subsequent appointment of a third party to work with the Council to administer the scheme.
3. A subsequent Policy Committee report from the Leader of the Council on the 12th December 2012 recommended the establishment of the Nottinghamshire Local Welfare Assistance Scheme.
4. The Nottinghamshire Local Welfare Assistance Scheme will support residents as outlined in the Policy Committee report. The criteria are broadly similar to those of Community Care Grants and Crisis Loans which the Nottinghamshire Welfare Assistance Fund replaces.
5. Some parts of the Social Fund will remain with the Department of Work and Pensions and these include the whole of the mandatory Social Fund (Sure Start Maternity Grants, Funeral Payments, and Cold Weather Payments) and Budgeting Loans which will continue until the introduction of Universal Credit when they will be replaced by Budgeting Advances.
6. The Policy Committee on 12th December 2012 agreed the criteria for eligibility for assistance from the Nottinghamshire Welfare Assistance Fund.
7. The Policy Committee on 12th December 2012 agreed that people who will be eligible to apply to the Nottinghamshire Local Welfare Assistance Scheme will be those that:

- are aged 16 or over; and
- are able to demonstrate they have been a permanent resident in Nottinghamshire County for at least one year immediately prior to applying (this excludes time spent living in temporary accommodation and in prison), with certain exclusions such as those suffering from Domestic Abuse; and
- are in receipt of benefits that will form part of the Universal Credit.

8. People meeting this criteria can apply if they:

- are leaving care and have a referral from a professional support worker (i.e. a social worker, probation officer etc.); or
- require support to stay in the community and have a referral from a professional support worker (i.e. a social worker, probation officer etc.); **and**
- have demonstrated they are without immediate resources to meet the basic needs of themselves and/or their dependents; **and**
- have demonstrated that they have tried to access other more appropriate discretionary funds or benefits.

9. Key areas for support will be to:

- a) Offer financial support/living expenses in relation to an emergency or as a consequence of disaster to avoid damage or serious risk to health and safety of the applicant or a member of their family.
- b) Alleviate immediately in a noticeable and substantial way the exceptional pressure being faced by a family.
- c) Help the applicant (or family member/carer) to remain living in the community where there is a high risk of the person needing to enter residential accommodation.
- d) Help the applicant (or family member/carer) to establish his or herself in the community following a stay in residential accommodation where care was provided.
- e) Help the applicant (or family member/carer) to set up home as part of a planned resettlement programme (following an unsettled way of life).
- f) Assist with travel expenses to visit a relative who is terminally ill or a relative's funeral, to ease a domestic crisis, to visit a child who is living with another parent pending a court decision or to move to more suitable accommodation.
- g) Allow an applicant or partner to care for a prisoner or young offender on a temporary license.

Delivering a Scheme for Nottinghamshire

10. Following a procurement exercise, Northgate Information Systems were appointed as the County Council's delivery agent to develop a managed service enabling applicants to apply to the fund via both online and via the telephone. Northgate have been appointed to administer Local Welfare Assistance Schemes for several other councils and unitary authorities, including Leicestershire County Council, Norfolk County Council, and the City of Portsmouth.
11. The local rate telephone line went live on the 2nd April 2013. Work to develop an online application process with Northgate is continuing. Despite the lack of online facility, this has not created a problem for applicants or support agencies in accessing the scheme.
12. In addition, the telephone system provides greater control over the information gathered to inform decisions and to ensure we target the scheme to people in the greatest need. As at 7th June 2013 there have been 631 applications made of which 169 met the eligibility criteria.
13. To date a third of the expenditure has been used to support people fleeing domestic violence to purchase essential household items such as fridges, bedding and cookers.
14. Another key area is to enable people to purchase essential food items. The remaining expenditure areas include travel, clothing and removal and storage.
15. In terms of the level of expenditure it is still relatively early in the financial year, but expenditure is within the budget available.

Future Developments

16. As part of developing the Nottinghamshire Welfare Assistance Fund the Council's aim is to source locally recycled furniture and white goods. Given the time constraints it was not possible to have this solution in place for the start of the scheme. Currently successful applicants receive vouchers for furniture or cash payments by pay point or BACS for travel and food.
17. We are currently investigating options to move towards a voucher scheme for localised options which include using food banks or establishing arrangements with supermarkets for the provision of food.
18. For awards for furniture and white goods initial discussions are taking place with local organisations on their ability to provide a localised service.
19. This will provide better value for money through utilising recycled and refurbished products. Additionally a localised solution to the awards would support the local economy.

Stakeholder Engagement and Communications

20. Stakeholders have been kept informed of the progress in accessing the fund.

Statutory and Policy Implications

21. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of finance, the public sector equality duty, human resources, crime and disorder, human rights, the safeguarding of children, sustainability and the environment and those using the service and where such implications are material they are described below. Appropriate consultation has been undertaken and advice sought on these issues as required.

RECOMMENDATION/S

- 1) It is recommended that the Adult Social Care and Health Committee note the contents of this report.

PAUL MCKAY

Service Director for Promoting Independence and Public Protection

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Constitutional Comments

22. As this report is for noting only no constitutional comments are required.

Financial Comments (KAS 07/06/13)

23. There are no financial implications contained within this report.

Background Papers

- a. Report of the Service Director for Promoting Independence and Public Protection to the Adult Social and Health Committee 29th October 2012.

<http://www.nottinghamshire.gov.uk/DMS/Document.ashx>

- b. Report of the Leader of the Council to Policy Committee 12th December 2012 – Establishment of a discretionary Nottinghamshire Local Welfare Assistance Scheme.

<http://www.nottinghamshire.gov.uk/DMS/Document.ashx>

- c. Report to the Adult Social Care and Health Committee on 25th March 2013

<http://www.nottinghamshire.gov.uk/DMS/Document.ashx>

Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected

All.

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