



REPORT OF THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

ESTABLISHMENT OF A DISCRETIONARY NOTTINGHAMSHIRE LOCAL WELFARE ASSISTANCE SCHEME

Purpose of the Report

1. To agree to the establishment of a discretionary Nottinghamshire Local Welfare Assistance Scheme to alleviate hardship following the abolition of the Department for Work and Pension administered Community Care Grants and Crisis Loans.

Information and Advice

Background

2. From April 2013 the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) will no longer provide Community Care Grants or Crisis Loans. To manage this transition the Government has made funds available to upper-tier and unitary local authorities in England to provide "... *emergency provision for vulnerable groups according to local circumstances, in order to meet severe hardship in the way they think best*".
3. Community Care Grants are awarded for a range of expenses, including household equipment, and are intended to support people to return to or remain in the community or to ease exceptional pressure on families. They were also intended to assist with certain travel expenses. Crisis Loans are made to meet immediate short-term needs in an emergency or as a consequence of a disaster when a person has insufficient resources to prevent a serious risk to the health and safety of themselves or their family.
4. In Nottinghamshire, demand for Community Care Grants and Crisis Loans has consistently exceeded available funding. In 2009/10 20,360 applications were made with only 63% of those receiving an award; in 2010/11 applications increased to 22,210 with 65% receiving an award and in 2011/12 applications were 17,490 with 65% of them granted. See Appendix A for details of Social Fund applications and spend in Nottinghamshire 2009-2012; Appendix B for applications by category in the first six months of 2011/12; and Appendix C for applications by demographic.
5. In the guidance received about the funding, local authorities are not required to replicate the previous Community Care Grant and Crisis Loans schemes. Instead councils can, "*flex the provision in a way that is suitable and appropriate to meet the needs of local communities*". The guidance also states "*Whilst the Government recognises the difficulties relating to the boundary between providing financial support and social services, we expect the funding to be concentrated on those facing greatest difficulty in managing their income, and to enable a*

more flexible response to unavoidable need, perhaps through a mix of cash or goods and aligning with the wider range of local support local authorities / devolved administrations already offer. In short, the funding is to allow you to give flexible help to those in genuine need”.

Funding

6. The funds allocated for Nottinghamshire to establish a scheme for alleviating hardship are:

Year	Development Costs	Programme Funding	Administrative Funding	Total
2012/2013	£17,849			£17,849
2013/2014		£1,784,916	£377,166	£2,162,082
2014/2015		£1,784,916	£345,713	£2,130,629

7. The allocations were announced at the end of August which has left limited time in which to develop a new hardship scheme for Nottinghamshire. Continued funding beyond the current Comprehensive Spending Review period (to March 2015) is unclear.
8. This report proposes a new Nottinghamshire Local Welfare Assistance Scheme to address hardship that will enable the Council to remain within the funding allocated for both administration and in the amounts dispersed. It is recommended that the full £2.1m Central Government allocation is used to fund the Scheme in year one and the development of a scheme for the future (from 2014/15) is then based on the data gathered and the experience gained in the first year of operation.

Proposal to establish a Nottinghamshire Local Welfare Assistance Scheme for Nottinghamshire

9. Work has been undertaken to develop options for the design and delivery of a Nottinghamshire Local Welfare Assistance Scheme for Nottinghamshire. This has been informed by an assessment of other local authorities' approaches and data and information from the DWP. However, it should be noted that in meeting the challenge of establishing a new scheme the Council faces a number of issues and challenges. These include:
- No expertise in administering welfare benefits of this nature
 - Limited access to information to detect fraud
 - Very limited historical data on which to model demand / need
 - A very challenging timetable for implementation by 1 April 2013
10. In light of these issues and the potential impact of the cessation of Community Care Grants and Crisis Loans, it is proposed that the funds allocated should be used to support individuals who may have previously had access to these benefits and cannot meet their need via any other provision. This is a pragmatic approach given the limitations of the current data and the fact that the basis of need is unlikely to change significantly. However, it is possible that any scheme will come under increasing demand due to the current economic climate and the cumulative effects of welfare reform.
11. For individuals in receipt of benefits who face a short-term immediate need for additional monies then the first port of call remains the DWP who will maintain funding to meet such needs. It is proposed that the Nottinghamshire Local Welfare Assistance Scheme will be a scheme of last resort (i.e. it is proposed that awards will only be available where there is no

other alternative and the application process will require evidence to show that attempts have been made to access other provision).

12. The purpose of the new Nottinghamshire Local Welfare Assistance Scheme will be '*to assist individuals in exceptional need out of immediate hardship where they are unable to access other types of support.*' Full details of the policy scheme are set out in the policy attached at Appendix D but the key areas for support would 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.
13. Eligibility criteria will mirror those for Community Care Grants and Crisis Loans except it is proposed there will be a restriction of one award and two applications per rolling year unless there are exceptional circumstances. It is also proposed that applicants will have to be in receipt of benefits that will form part of the Universal Credit and will have to evidence a residency requirement in the County of one year immediately prior to applying (excluding time spent living in temporary accommodation and in prison).
14. Regardless of the eligibility criteria any financial assistance will be discretionary, which means that even if people meet the priorities for support, they will only get financial assistance if it is judged that their need is paramount, and there sufficient funding in the budget to provide the award. DWP currently operate the Community Care Grant and Crisis Loan schemes in this way. In essence, being eligible to apply for assistance does not confer an entitlement to an award.
15. Awards will be made in vouchers wherever possible with certain exclusions (e.g. food vouchers excluding expenditure on alcohol or tobacco products). The Council will endeavour to source recycled furniture and white goods, but it may not be possible to have this solution in place for the 1 April. In the short term it may be necessary to offer vouchers for new goods until the recycled market has developed sufficiently to manage the demand from not just the Nottinghamshire scheme but also the City Council scheme.
16. It is not considered practical to offer loans as part of the scheme. Unlike the DWP, the Council will not have direct access to benefits payments to individuals from which to secure repayments. The cost of recouping the loans through other means would be uneconomic,

particularly given the high volumes and relatively small value of the average Crisis Loan award.

Scheme Delivery

17. The recommended model for delivery of the Nottinghamshire Local Welfare Assistance Scheme would be a third party organisation engaged via an open, competitive procurement exercise. This is considered to have several advantages. It would purchase capacity from an external organisation to ensure the service is up and running from the beginning of April 2013 as required, without having a detrimental effect on current County Council services. As stated previously the Council does not have expertise in this area, nor does it currently have the capacity.
18. There are a number of organisations who have experience of offering funding or other practical support to people in crisis who will be able to offer whole-service delivery which could include the provision of online user-friendly IT and assessment solutions and access to discounted goods through already-established procurement agreements. If this option were chosen an appropriate specification for the work would be developed and effective contract management and service development would be put in place. The specification for the work would ensure that the service is focused on those who are most vulnerable, checking that the fund is accessible throughout the year whilst ensuring management within the limited financial envelope.
19. It is proposed that the County Council contracts with a third party organisation to provide a managed service for the delivery of the Nottinghamshire Local Welfare Assistance Scheme initially for a period of one year with an annual option to extend for a further year up to a maximum of three years in total.

2014/15 and beyond

20. Options for scheme design have been complicated by the challenges and issues set out in the report, not least the very restricting timetable for implementation and the limited data on which to understand and model need / demand. However, beyond the first year there is scope to enable delivery of service provision that is better equipped to understand the demand, to understand the root causes behind the demand and to design a more responsive service that provides a more sustainable solution in conjunction with a range of stakeholders in Nottinghamshire.
21. It is proposed that the Nottinghamshire Local Welfare Assistance Scheme as set out in this report and the appended policy provides an interim provision in year one (Apr 13 – Mar 14). The learning from year one will then enable the review and development of the provision in accordance with local need in year two (Apr 14 – Mar 15). This review exercise will be conducted in dialogue and consultation with key stakeholders, including voluntary and community organisations in Nottinghamshire.

Other Options Considered

22. The other options considered for delivering the new scheme include creating a new service run by the Council; linking the Welfare Assistance Scheme to existing County Council

services and delivering the Scheme via district and borough councils. The detail of these options are set out below.

Option 1: Creating a new service run by the County Council

23. The Council has very limited relevant experience, skills and capacity to deliver a scheme of the nature proposed within a constrained financial envelope. Creating a new service would involve the recruitment of staff, a new service and significant set up costs.
24. At present, workloads are such that this would inevitably place a strain on the achievement of other Council priorities. On current rough estimates, the service would require a team manager and between up to 15 officers to ensure delivery of the service. Recruitment would have to be commenced, IT systems would need to be either designed or purchased, accommodation would need to be secured and staff would need to be trained prior to April 2013. Significant officer time would be needed to oversee this set up. The estimated cost of this is considered to be more costly than if it were provided externally, given that any external provider is likely to already have the expertise to deliver the service and will therefore be able to draw on scale economies.
25. The risks associated with running the scheme in-house include cost, identifying fraudulent claims, managing the flow of successful applications to keep within the available funds and having a system and service in place and operational from 1 April 2013. For these reasons this is not recommended as the preferred option.

Option 2: Link the Social Fund to existing County Council services

26. Initially it was felt that there might be some advantage to linking the Nottinghamshire Local Welfare Assistance Scheme to an existing Council service and a number of options have been considered in this area, such as alignment with Children's Social Care and Adult Social Care. There are however significant challenges in delivering such a scheme within these existing Council services due to fundamental differences in areas such as customer base and nature of service required as follows:
27. Children's Social Care – Whilst there is some commonality with Section 17 payments (for families with children in need) the Nottinghamshire Local Welfare Assistance Scheme would not align well with Children's Social Care given that a significant proportion of existing Community Care Grant and Crisis Loan claimants do not have children and the skill set of the service lies within the children and families arena. This may also have the effect of increasing social care referrals if this was the way of accessing the support offered through the Scheme.
28. Adult Social Care – Similar challenges exist in Adult Social Care. Whilst Adult Social Care customers are adults, they are mostly older people, whereas the majority of Community Care Grant and Crisis Loan claimants are younger people with a minimal number of claimants who are over 55 years of age. In addition there is no similar scheme run for adults which could be adapted for the new Scheme and the danger of increased social care referrals would be as for Children's Social Care.
29. For the reasons outlined this option is not recommended as the preferred option.

Option 3: Delivery in conjunction with District and Borough Councils

30. Some County Councils such as Leicestershire County Council are working with their districts to design and administer their local hardship schemes. District and borough councils do have expertise and experience in administering benefits and should have access to relevant systems and data. Using the data provided by the DWP the Council could apportion the funds available between the districts and boroughs. However, for this option to be viable all seven districts would need to sign-up and preliminary informal discussions with Heads of Revenues and Benefits or equivalent indicated that there was limited interest in pursuing this. It would now not be feasible to formalise these discussions and negotiate a scheme capable of implementation by 1 April 2013 and, as such, this approach is not recommended as the preferred option.

Reasons for Recommendations

31. The options set out in the report have been identified and analysed based on as much information as is available about the current service and requirements for a new localised scheme.
32. This is a new service for councils that is not easily slotted into current provision. There are risks, given the nature of the work, to placing it in house and disrupting services which are already under significant pressure in the current economic climate.
33. An effective procurement process can achieve the same benefits as in house provision, using the benefits of a collaborative approach to learn more about the demand in the first year and to shape the service around this demand accordingly in subsequent years.

Statutory and Policy Implications

34. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of finance, equal opportunities, 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.

Financial Implications

35. The DWP has issued settlement figures to local authorities for the first two years of their local schemes. The Nottinghamshire County Council allocation is set out at paragraph six. The level of funding being transferred to Nottinghamshire for 2013/14 for scheme funding is 2.6% less than the DWP spent on Community Care Grants and Crisis Loans in Nottinghamshire in 2010/11.

Equalities Implications

36. The Council's procurement process for the new service will be subject to the usual scrutiny required by the Equality Act 2010. Additionally, to provide evidence of anti-discriminatory practice, the new provider of the service will be required to monitor the allocation of the budget by collecting data on recipients with protected characteristics.

37. The Council will carry out monitoring and stakeholder consultation during the first 12 months of the scheme to ensure fair practice. An Equalities Impact Assessment with all information currently available has been completed. It will be reviewed in April 2014.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Policy Committee:

- a. Approves the Policy (at Appendix D) and the proposal to establish a Nottinghamshire Local Welfare Assistance Scheme for Nottinghamshire.
- b. Approves the procurement of a third party organisation to provide a managed service for the delivery of the Scheme in accordance with the approach outlined in this report.
- c. Approves the use of the full £2.1m Central Government allocation to fund the Nottinghamshire Local Welfare Assistance Scheme and to develop longer term solutions.
- d. Require the Service Director for Promoting Independence and Public Protection in consultation with the Leader of the Council, the Service Director of Finance and Procurement and the Group Manager Legal Services, to take the following operational decisions:
 - sign-off the service specification for the Nottinghamshire Local Welfare Assistance Scheme;
 - award the contract;
 - determine the terms and conditions upon which the contract will be awarded;
 - such other action which is considered necessary to achieve the outcomes outlined in this report.

Taking into account the tight deadlines described in this report.

- e. Require the Service Director for Promoting Independence and Public Protection to report to the Policy Committee on the first six months of operation and proposals for operation beyond April 2014.

COUNCILLOR KAY CUTTS
Leader of the Council

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Constitutional Comments (SG 26/11/12)

38. The Committee is the appropriate body to decide the issues set out in this Report.

Financial Comments (PDS 26/11/12)

39. The financial implications are set out in paragraph 6 of the report. It is critical that full consideration is given to establishing a set of criteria for accessing this funding that will meet both customer needs, whilst at the same time ensuring that the overall cost of the Scheme is contained within the allocated funding.

Background Papers

Except for previously published documents, which will be available elsewhere, the documents listed here will be available for inspection in accordance with Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972.

The Welfare Reform Act 2012

Social Fund Guide – DWP, May 2012

Government response Local support to replace Community Care Grants and Crisis Loans for living expenses in England June 2011.

Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected

All

Appendix A

Community Care Grant and Crisis Loans Applications Data, April 09- March 12

Nottinghamshire	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
Community Care Grant Applications	5,430	5,500	5,160
<i>Applications Per Week</i>	104	106	99
<i>Awards Made</i>	2520	2350	2220
<i>Award Rate</i>	46.4%	42.7%	43.0%
<i>Average Award</i>	£446	£551	£564
<i>Total Awarded</i>	£1,125,000	£1,295,000	£1,251,300
Crisis Loan Applications	14,930	16,710	12,330
<i>Applications Per Week</i>	287	321	237
<i>Awards Made</i>	10260	12120	9210
<i>Award Rate</i>	68.7%	72.5%	74.7%
<i>Average Award</i>	£101	£96	£63
<i>Total Awarded</i>	£1,037,100	£1,168,500	£581,200
Total Applications for CCGs and CLs	20,360	22,210	17,490
<i>Applications Per Week</i>	392	427	336
<i>Awards Made</i>	12780	14470	11430
<i>Award Rate</i>	62.8%	65.2%	65.4%
<i>Average Award</i>	£169	£170	£160
<i>Total Awarded</i>	£2,162,100	£2,463,500	£1,832,500

Source of Data: Department for Work & Pensions, 2012

Appendix B

Applications in Nottinghamshire by category for the 6 months from April 2011 to September 2011

Community Care Grants	Spend	As % of CCG Cost	Average Award Cost
Applications by Category			
Moving out of residential/institutional accommodation	£ 41,590	6.1%	£245
Helping people to stay in the community	£ 137,470	20.3%	£573
Families under exceptional pressure	£ 432,810	63.8%	£676
Prisoners/offenders on temporary release	£ 130	0.0%	-
Planned resettlement	£ 60,210	8.9%	£753
Travel expenses	£ 5,790	0.9%	£145
Community Care Grant Total	£ 678,000	100.0%	£579
Crisis Loans	Spend	As % of CL Cost	Average Award Cost
Applications by Category			
Leaving care and not entitled to benefit	£ 1,400	0.4%	£47
Leaving care - rent in advance	£ 100	0.0%	-
Disaster e.g. fire, flood, explosion, chemical leaks etc	£ 2,800	0.9%	£56
Emergency travelling expenses	£ 300	0.1%	£30
Lost or stolen money/giro	£ 56,400	18.0%	£61
Capital not realisable	£ 39,000	12.4%	£57
Reconnection of fuel supply	£ 200	0.1%	-
Homelessness - securing accommodation	£ 19,400	6.2%	£323
Benefit spent - living expenses required	£ 132,100	42.2%	£50
JSA disallowance imposed on customer	£ 50,600	16.2%	£202
JSA sanction imposed on customer	£ 400	0.1%	-
Item needs replacement	£ 10,600	3.4%	£88
Crisis Loan Total	£ 313,300	100.0%	£65
Fund Total	£ 991,300		

Source of Data: Department for Work & Pensions, 2011. Latest data available.

Demographic Information

2011/2012 (Full Year)	Crisis Loans	Community Care Grants
Awards & applications rounded to nearest 10		
Summary		
Number of Applications received	12,330	5,160
Total expenditure	£581,200	£1,251,300
Number of Awards	9,210	2,220
Lone Parent Status		
Lone Parent	19%	32%
Not a Lone Parent	64%	42%
Unknown	17%	26%
Age of youngest child	0	
0-5	20%	31%
6-8	3%	3%
9-12	2%	4%
13-16	2%	3%
No children 16 or under	73%	58%
Age of recipient	0	
Under 18	2%	1%
18 to 24	35%	25%
25 to 34	32%	27%
35 to 44	19%	22%
45 to 54	10%	14%
55 to 64	3%	9%
65 to 69	0%	2%
70 to 79	0%	1%
80 to 89	0%	0%
90 and over	0%	0%
Unknown	0%	0%
Household type	0	
Couple	13%	17%
Single Female	36%	50%
Single Male	51%	32%

Source Data: Department for Work & Pensions, 2012
Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding

DRAFT DISCRETIONARY NOTTINGHAMSHIRE LOCAL WELFARE ASSISTANCE SCHEME POLICY

Background

As part of the Government's overall plans for welfare reform (as set out in the Welfare Reform Act), Community Care Grants and Crisis Loans for general living expenses which are currently administered by the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) as part of the Discretionary Social Fund will be abolished from April 2013.

Current DWP (as at Autumn 2012) policy states that Crisis Loans are to meet immediate needs such as general living expenses or items needed following a disaster and entitlement is not dependent upon receipt of a benefit. Community Care Grants (CCG's) are non-repayable grants to enable vulnerable people to live in the community and are conditional upon receipt of an income related benefit.

The Department for Work and Pensions will continue to operate the remaining elements of the Social Fund including Budgeting Loans (intended to help those on benefits spread the cost of intermittent expenses over a longer period) and Alignment Crisis Loans that are needed as a result of delays in the payment of benefits/system failure (for example Tax Credit delays or to cover living expenses up to the first payment of benefits or wages). From April 2013 these will be called Budgeting Advances and Short-Term Advances.

The Government has made funds available to upper-tier and unitary local authorities in England to provide "... *emergency provision for vulnerable groups according to local circumstances, in order to meet severe hardship in the way they think best*".

The Government has stated that it believes any new service is better delivered locally and this will empower local communities to better identify and meet the needs of the most vulnerable.

This document sets out the County Council's draft policy for discretionary financial support under the Nottinghamshire Local Welfare Assistance Scheme.

Purpose and Principles of the Scheme

The purpose of the new the Nottinghamshire Local Welfare Assistance Scheme is to:

Assist individuals in exceptional need out of immediate hardship where they are unable to access other types of support

The Scheme is the responsibility of Nottinghamshire County Council and it will be delivered by [to be inserted following Policy Committee decision 12 December 2012].

The Scheme will seek to provide financial assistance to those people in Nottinghamshire with the highest levels of need where they are unable to meet their immediate short term needs or where they require assistance to maintain their independence within the community.

The scheme will seek to ensure that there is high quality, consistent decision making within agreed service levels.

The policy seeks to treat each applicant fairly and equitably with full consideration given to their circumstances. The scheme will ensure financial assistance will be used as a last resort when all other avenues of support have demonstrably been explored and exhausted; this will help to protect the remaining funds for people most in need.

Consideration will be given to the nature, extent and urgency of the need in every case that is considered.

The policy seeks to meet the particular needs of the County's most vulnerable residents and will be developed and administered in accordance with public sector equality and child poverty duties.

The policy framework within which the service is delivered will seek, over time, to facilitate joined up working with other agencies including not for profit organisations. It will provide an inter referral process which makes effective use of relevant available local services and funding provision.

It is not intended that the scheme will extend to those who have access to sufficient income, savings or suitable forms credit.

The scheme will not cover needs which are more appropriately addressed by other discretionary funds or benefits including Budgeting Advances, Short-Term Advances, localised Council Tax Support and Probation Bonds for rent in advance and Discretionary Housing Payments etc. Where appropriate applicants will be referred to the administrators of these or other relevant discretionary funds.

Targeted Scenarios for Support

In order to ensure that this Nottinghamshire Local Welfare Assistance Scheme is allocated to those who need it most in the County, the scheme will:

- a) take account of local need for people in financial hardship
- b) ensure any financial assistance, is allocated as fairly as possible and
- c) ensure that there is sufficient financial assistance available throughout the whole year, including managing any spend on financial assistance within an appropriate financial model.

Due to the limitations of the resource of the new scheme, even if someone meets the priorities for support, this does not mean that they will be entitled to financial assistance. It will depend on the urgency of their need, and the funding that is available in the budget at that time.

The key areas for support would be to:

- h) 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.

- i) Alleviate immediately in a noticeable and substantial way the exceptional pressure being faced by a family
- j) 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
- k) 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.
- l) Help the applicant (or family member/carer) to set up home as part of a planned resettlement programme (following an unsettled way of life)
- m) 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.
- n) Allow an applicant or partner to care for a prisoner or young offender on a temporary license

The scheme will aim to target those within the community who have been identified as the most vulnerable and in need of urgent financial assistance or support. The scheme will consider issuing awards under two types of need to those people who require immediate support and to people who require assistance to establish or maintain a home in the community.

Groups most likely to require this form of assistance may include (this list is not exhaustive):

- Families in need of emergency financial support
- Homeless people or rough sleepers
- Older people at risk of harm
- People fleeing domestic violence
- Young people leaving care
- People moving out of institutional or residential care
- Ex-offenders leaving prison or detention centres
- Chronically or terminally ill people
- People with learning difficulties
- People with mental health issues

Applications for awards of immediate financial assistance may include people who:

- Have no essential food
- Need essential goods associated with infants/children
- Require help with emergency travel costs
- Have suffered a major upheaval or disaster

Assistance to establish or maintain a new home in the community may be considered for people who for example (this list is not exhaustive):

- Have been in long term care
- Have left prison
- Have fled domestic violence
- Move to supported accommodation/independent living
- Need essential repairs to heating systems.

Awards could be to help with the provision of:

- Beds
- Bedding
- White goods
- Provision of heating appliances
- Essential domestic appliances/cookware
- Essential domestic furniture
- Clothing for expectant mothers or babies
- Emergency transport costs
- Redecoration following a disaster or due to related health needs.

Awards would not normally be given for:

- A television or satellite cost or repair
- Installation of a telephone or telephone line
- Housing costs or arrears of rent
- Costs normally met by state support or benefits including Universal Credit
- Debts
- Motor vehicle expenses
- TV license
- Where the applicant has access to sufficient income or savings
- Costs associated with care provision
- Shortfalls in Council Tax Support awards or reductions in Housing Benefit including those associated with the social sector size criteria.

Any financial assistance will be discretionary, which means that even if people meet the priorities for support, they will only get financial assistance if it is judged that their need is paramount, and there is enough money left in the budget to fund the award.

Over time, the scheme will actively seek partnership arrangements with local organisations that can provide assistance such as food banks and furniture re-use centres. It will endeavour to work with local businesses to procure goods and services to support an accessible, value for money service.

The policy will also seek to ensure that the support is sustainable. People who submit repeat applications or are identified as in need of requiring another form of assistance will be referred to an appropriate local advice service for support such as budget or debt advice or counselling services. Different support services will be encouraged to work in concert to deliver an approach which would prevent repeat applications.

There will normally be a limit on awards to a maximum of 1 in any rolling 12 month period unless there are exceptional circumstances.

Eligibility

People who will be eligible to apply to the Scheme will be those that:

- Are aged 16 or over
- 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)
- Are in receipt of benefits that will form part of the Universal Credit.
- Leaving care and have a referral from a professional support worker (i.e. a social worker, probation officer etc.)
- Require support to stay in the community and have a referral from a professional support worker (i.e. a social worker, probation officer etc.)
- Have demonstrated they are without immediate resource to meet the basic needs of themselves and / or their dependents.
- Have demonstrated that they have tried to access other more appropriate discretionary funds or benefits

Under new data sharing powers it is anticipated that those administering the scheme will have access to DWP data in relation to income. The Council will consider available data on income and savings to determine if a person is eligible for an award.

All requests will be considered on an individual basis with due account given to the vulnerability and personal circumstances of each applicant.

The amount of remaining available funding will be relevant to the prioritisation of awards and this will require that expenditure is reviewed on a monthly basis. Discretion will be used where necessary, taking into account any impact on public sector equalities duty.

During the course of administering the Scheme, the Council will seek to facilitate working with other agencies (including district councils, voluntary and community organisations) to identify and provide a referral route for potential beneficiaries of the scheme.

The Application Process

The application process will be clear, transparent and accessible, allowing people to request support through a number of access channels.

Applications made from applicants' appointees or their representatives (subject to customer consent) will be considered.

The application process will be designed to provide consistent and fair decision making by gathering appropriate data and supporting information.

The application and the process will be flexible to avoid undue delays and reflect that some awards require more detailed information. Applications will primarily be made via the phone. There will be no facility for face to face interviews

Case management processes and turnaround times will be structured to ensure timely high quality decision making. Applications for emergency assistance will be prioritised with service levels in place for agreed timescales for the decision making, payment of awards and a review process.

Applications will normally be limited to a maximum of 2 in any rolling 12 month period unless there are exceptional circumstances. Repeat applications will be considered on a case by case basis. People with a history of repeat applications will be referred to advice for sustainable support such as budgeting or debt advice.

Methods of Assistance

The scheme will seek to provide appropriate methods of awarding support and allow the Council or its agent to decide to whom the award should be made based upon the individual circumstances of each applicant.

Consideration will be given to making awards to the appropriate party which may include:

- The applicant
- Their partner
- An appointee or authorised representative
- Directly to a service or goods provider.

Appropriate methods of payment may include:

- Vouchers for food
- Payments to suppliers of suitable goods or services
- Pre-payment cards
- Goods from suppliers (wherever possible locally sourced)
- Goods and services from non-profit making organisations
- Travel vouchers

Cash payments will be avoided where possible.

Wherever possible recycled furniture and white goods will be sourced and vouchers will exclude expenditure on alcohol or tobacco.

The delivery method of providing support will be flexible in how, when and where awards will be given to reflect the individual requirements of each application.

Loans will not form part of the service provision.

There will be maximum awards for both living expenses and particular items which will be based on an assessment of market cost.

Financial Constraints and Controls

Central Government funding arrangements will be cash limited taking into account the historic data available on past Community Care Grants and Crisis Loans payments.

Annual funding is finite and close and regular monitoring of the Scheme will be required. In the event that there is a local emergency (for example flood or fire) affecting several households the Council may wish to review available funds.

ICT systems will be put in place which provide detailed and robust management information to allow continuous monitoring and real time information in relation to:

- issuing of awards
- methods of payment
- projected expenditure based on current demand
- awards made
- equalities data
- speed of awards and complaints.

All financial management will be subject to monthly and quarterly reporting and review and awards will be made on the basis of available funds.

The policy will seek to deter fraudulent claims and false statements ensuring appropriate controls are in place and swift action is taken where required. Consideration will also be given to reducing the potential for duplicate applications within alternative support provision or neighbouring authorities.

The policy will seek to minimise the potential for fraudulent applications which in turn will maximise the limited funding available for those most in need.

Appeals

There will not be an appeals process as any financial assistance will be allocated on a needs basis and is affected by current demand; and decisions cannot be made regarding an individual without impacting on someone else's competing needs. As there is not an entitlement to assistance, even if a person meets the priorities for support, this does not mean they can be granted financial assistance.

There will however be a complaints process which will ensure that the service can listen to concerns and use a continuous improvement model to ensure the service is always targeted at those most in need in the County.

Policy Review

This policy sets out the arrangements for the Nottinghamshire Local Welfare Assistance Scheme interim provision in year one (Apr 13 – Mar 14). Key facets of the policy will be kept under review and may be amended from time to time by the appropriate authority.

The learning from year one will enable year two (Apr 14 – Mar 15) service provision to be reviewed and developed in accordance with identified local need.

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