



31st March 2014

Agenda Item: 11

**REPORT OF SERVICE DIRECTOR FOR PROMOTING INDEPENDENCE AND
PUBLIC PROTECTION**

REPORT ON THE NOTTINGHAMSHIRE WELFARE ASSISTANCE FUND

Purpose of the Report

1. To inform members of the alternative arrangements for advising people who would previously have been supported under the Nottinghamshire Welfare Assistance Fund.

Information and Advice

Background

2. Following the transfer of responsibility of some elements of the Social Fund to the County Council a procurement process was undertaken for delivery of an award based scheme.
3. Northgate Information Systems were contracted to deliver a scheme for 2013/14. The fund made awards to individuals in emergency or crisis via a local rate telephone number. The eligibility criterion for the scheme was agreed in the County Council's policy committee on the 12 December 2012.
4. The Nottinghamshire Welfare Assistance Fund, (NWAFF) commenced operation on 2 April 2013.
5. As part of the Budget Challenge consultation an outline business case was produced proposing the removal of the current scheme, informed by a significant under spend on awards and high administration costs during 2013/14 and the removal of this funding for 2015 onwards.
6. The funding available for 2014/15 will be utilised to support to vulnerable people by other means including retaining the 4 members of the Benefits Team, to provide support to these individuals in maximising the benefits available to them.
7. This Business Case was agreed at the Full Council meeting on 27 February 2014.

Proposal for managing the scheme closure

8. The Consultation phase identified the risk that individuals in emergency and crisis situations would have little or no support available to them.

9. In response to this the Council developed an Emergency Advice pathway through the Customer Service Centre, with improved signposting to Third Sector and District Council support and offering, where appropriate, onward referrals to the Benefits Team and to the Adult Access Service. This pathway will become known as the “Emergency Advice Service”, to distinguish it from the previous NWAf scheme.
10. The Work processes of the Benefits Team have been revised to reflect the support these calls will require and web based advice has been updated and expanded to enable signposting to this wherever appropriate.
11. Despite the previously reported low spend on awards to the NWAf; some 7340 telephone calls were received by Northgate in the period 2 April 2013 – 31 January 2014. Whilst this figure is high, a significant proportion of these were call backs regarding existing applications or querying decisions.
12. Therefore, it is not predicted this will be the volume going forward. Only 1,357 full applications were completed via NWAf, some calls not completing full applications would still receive signposting to organisations such as food banks. It is estimated approximately 15 calls per day but this figure will require ongoing review.
13. The level of calls received will be influenced by the engagement of those signposting individuals to the Council for support. Whilst the DWP and jobcentres have been briefed on the removal of the fund, during 2014/15 the Council retains funding to support those in crisis consequently referrals may continue from these bodies.
14. Management Information provided by Northgate has highlighted that the calls received can be significant in length. With a longest call time of 79 minutes, whilst the reported average call time is low at 7 minutes this is disproportionately influenced by the number of call backs referred to in point 9 above.
15. Continued monitoring and reporting on the volumes of calls received as a result of the scheme removal has been built into the pathway.
16. The Senior Benefits Officer will report on these to the Service Director – Promoting Independence and Public Protection, the Team Manager – Adult Access Service and the Group Manager – Customer Service. An updated report to Committee will be produced should the levels require.

Other Options Considered

17. As part of the budget consultation alternative options were considered.

Stakeholder Engagement and Communications

18. Significant responses were received as part of the consultation process for the proposal to cease NWAf, the actions outlined within this paper were developed to offer mitigation to some of the risks identified.
19. The Council will work with stakeholders to disseminate the new practices.

Financial Implications

20. There are no financial implications contained in this report.

Statutory and Policy Implications

21. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of crime and disorder, finance, human resources, human rights, the public sector equality duty, safeguarding of children and vulnerable adults, service users sustainability and the environment and ways of working 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

It is recommended that the Adult Social Care and Health Committee:

- 1) Notes the closure of the Nottinghamshire Welfare Assistance Fund.
- 2) Notes the new name for the new pathway for advice, the "Emergency Advice Service".

PAUL MCKAY

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Constitutional Comments

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

Financial Comments

23. To follow.

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>

Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected

All

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