

REPORT TO: Corporate Policy and Performance Board
DATE: 3rd September 2013
REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director – Policy and Resources
PORTFOLIO: Resources
SUBJECT: Discretionary Support Scheme
WARD(S): Borough-wide

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1. To receive an update on the implementation of the Discretionary Support Scheme after the first three months of its operation.

2. RECOMMENDATION:

- i. That the report be noted.**
- ii. That a further paper regarding the provision of fuel be submitted to the Corporate Policy and Performance Working Party before the end of October.**

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1. The Discretionary Support Scheme, which was previously administered by The Department of Work and Pensions (DWP), was abolished by the Welfare Reform Act from April 2013. At this time Crisis Loans (CL), for general living expenses and Community Care Grants (CCG) were replaced by a new service administered by the Council. This Board was instrumental in developing the key aspects of the Council's Scheme.
- 3.2. The scheme was in place and introduced in Halton in April. Its introduction was done to a very tight timescale and happened during a time of significant change for the Revenues and Benefits Team. Payments from the scheme have been made against a set of criteria previously agreed with a working party whose membership was drawn from this Board.
- 3.3. Halton was allocated the following funding, over a three year period. No announcements have been made about future funding:

2012/2013 Set Up Funding £6,496

2013/2014 Programme Funding £649,558

2013/2014 Administrative funding £137,257

2014/2015 Programme Funding £649,558

2014/2015 Administrative funding £125,810

- 3.4. This funding was not ringfenced. However, the DWP stated that although they do not expect local authorities to replicate the existing scheme it was the intention of government that the funding would be used by Councils to provide support to vulnerable people in their area.
- 3.5 The Working Party requested that the core elements of the current DWP scheme be retained where possible, namely:
- Assistance with living expenses due to an emergency or crisis
 - Assistance for vulnerable people to help return to or remain in the community or to ease exceptional pressure on families
- 3.6 In addition the Working Party agreed the following:
- That no cash payments be made;
 - That no payments for fuel be made; and
 - That the Application process be either by phone or the internet.
- 3.7 These characteristics of the scheme were agreed, given the need for the Council to develop a scheme within the resources available. It was agreed that the scheme be reviewed after the first three months of its operation.

4. UPDATE AT THE END OF QUARTER 1

- 4.1. At the end of Quarter 1 £20k has been paid out of the Discretionary Support Scheme.
- 4.2 Appendix 1 gives a breakdown of Applications received to date by month.
- 4.3 Appendix 2 gives a breakdown of applications between emergency and community support.
- 4.4 Appendix 3 gives a more detailed breakdown on amounts awarded.
- 4.5 Appendix 4 gives a breakdown of the items awarded.

5. CONSIDERATIONS

- 5.1 The DWP did not expect local authorities to replicate the existing service provision.

- 5.2 Like most other authorities the decision not to pay cash has seen a dramatic reduction in payments made from the fund.
- 5.3 In addition the decision not to pay fuel would also appear to have led to a reduction in applications.
- 5.4 Although many people have been more than satisfied with the service, feedback from some external organisations has asked for consideration to be given to:
- Making payments of fuel.
 - Improving the standard of furniture provided.
 - Improving the standard of food provided.

6. WAY FORWARD

Three months is still a relatively short period during which to make any significant conclusions or changes to the Scheme, however, it is suggested that a further report be submitted to the Working Party by the end of October on the options for fuel payments for further consideration.

The use of second hand furniture as an alternative to purchasing new furniture be monitored and feedback given to the Working Party, again in October.

7. IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

- 7.1 It has the potential to affect all Council priorities.

8. RISK ANALYSIS

- 8.1 Payments will be monitored from the scheme to ensure that these remain with budget.
- 8.2 A report will be submitted to the PPB Working Party by the end of October regarding payments for fuel which will ensure that consideration can be given to the onset of cold weather.

9. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

- 9.1 The eligibility criteria and application process would have to ensure that no particular groups of individuals were excluded. An Equality Impact Assessment will need to take place on any amended Scheme.

10. LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

Document	Place of Inspection	Contact Officer
-----------------	----------------------------	------------------------

Various letters from Revenues & Benefits Peter McCann
the Department of & Customer Services
Works and Pensions Division

Kingsway House
Widnes

Appendix 1

Applications Received by Month				
2013/14	Total Received	Runcorn	Widnes	Outside of Area
April	227	84	102	41
May	206	97	75	34
June	195	96	74	25
Total	628	277	251	100

Appendix 2

Breakdown Of Applications		Emergency Support		Community Support	
		Runcorn	Widnes	Runcorn	Widnes
Received Applications	628	180	194	97	57
Granted	63	11	5	29	18
Awarded Amount	£ 19,057	£ 409	£ 160	£10,483	£8,006
Percentage Awarded		2%	1%	55%	42%
Rejected Applications	565	169	189	68	39

Appendix 3

	Emergency Support				Community Support			
2013/14	No. Apps	No. Granted	No. Refused	Awarded £	No. Apps	No. Granted	No. Refused	Awarded £
April	194	5	189	£ 159	33	7	26	£ 2,801
May	144	4	140	£ 143	62	19	43	£ 5,754
June	124	7	117	£ 265	71	21	50	£ 9,935
Total	462	16	446	£ 568	166	47	119	£ 18,490

Appendix 4

Items Awarded	
Adult Food pack	16
Child Food Pack	3
Adult Vegetarian pack	1
Single Bed with bedding	38
Single Bed	2
Single Mattress	5
Double Bed	0
Double Bed with bedding	3
Double Mattress	2
Bunk Beds with Bedding	3
Bunk Bed	1
Cot with bedding	4
Sofa	32
Set of curtains	21
Cooker	9
Washing machine	1
Fridge	1
Kitchen equipment	31
Table and Chairs	1
Clothing	1
Toiletry Pack	2
Prams	1
Total	178