

Agenda Item IMD25

INDIVIDUAL EXECUTIVE MEMBER DECISION

REFERENCE IMD: 2018/25

TITLE	Local Welfare provision policy 2018 / 2019
DECISION TO BE MADE BY	Executive Member for Finance and Corporate Resources – Julian McGhee-Sumner
DATE, MEETING ROOM and TIME	14 June 2018 LGF 4 16.00
WARD	None Specific;
DIRECTOR	Director of Corporate Services - Graham Ebers

OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY

Wokingham Borough Council (the Council) considers that it is in the best interests of the community to run a scheme. The scheme will be reviewed annually to provide the Council with an opportunity to understand, measure and respond to local demand.

This scheme will be known as the Local Welfare Provision (LWP) scheme and will apply from the date of adoption, until changed.

The purpose of this policy is to detail the Council's high level objectives in respect of Local Welfare Provision and detail how the Council will operate the scheme, including the factors that will be taken into account when considering if a Local Welfare Provision award can be made. Each case will be treated strictly on its merits and all applicants will be treated equally and fairly when the scheme is administered.

Protecting the vulnerable residents of Wokingham Borough forms part of the duties and responsibilities of various council (and partner) teams. With the emergency financial provision through LWP we aim to further assist vulnerable people who may be in crisis or an emergency where financial assistance would help. It recognises that in addition to the wide spectrum of support that is available to its residents, the Council needs to be flexible in order to mitigate unforeseen circumstances that will place additional pressure on residents and the services they receive.

The LWP scheme is to stop unforeseen issues escalating into more serious or systemic problems that require a more sustained and intensive response.

A LWP award will normally be an urgent, one-off provision used as a short term fix to prevent a long term problem, and we will seek to:

- ease severe financial pressure on families in certain situations;
- give flexible financial help to those in genuine need;
- prevent serious risk to the health, well-being or safety of the borough's most vulnerable and financially excluded residents;
- help those without the necessary means. This could include assistance to those

coming in to the Borough from care or prison, or those already here, to remain in their community;

- signposting to the best organisation to assist with needs.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Executive Member for Finance and Corporate Resources approve the draft policy amendments to be implemented from April 2018.

SUMMARY OF REPORT

The Council will consider making a LWP award to applicants who meet the qualifying criteria, as specified in this policy, providing sufficient funding for this purpose is available at the time of the Council's decision. All applications will be considered on their individual merits.

The features of the Council's LWP scheme are that:

- it is discretionary;
- an applicant does not have a statutory right to a payment;
- the total expenditure in any one year resulting from awards under this scheme will not exceed the value of the funding decided by Wokingham Borough Council;
- the operation of the scheme is for the Council to determine;
- the Council may choose to vary the way in which funds are allocated according to community needs and available funds;
- other than the normal appeal against the application of a discretionary function by Judicial Review, there is no right to a statutory appeal of any application decision. In the interests of fairness the Council will operate an internal review procedure for appeals in a non-discriminatory way.

Background

The Welfare Reform Act 2012 (the Act) ends the current provision of Community Care Grants and Crisis Loans under the Discretionary Social Fund for living expenses provided by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP).

Since 1st April 2013, funding was transferred from the DWP to Local Authorities to provide locally designed and administered assistance to vulnerable people.

There is no statutory duty requiring local authorities to deliver a specific scheme for administering this funding. Between 2013 and 2016, scheme funding was provided by allocations granted by Government for this specific purpose. From 1st April 2016, the scheme is cash-limited to the amount of funding provided by Wokingham Borough Council from its general funds. It doesn't replace the support mechanisms and budgets that exist elsewhere within local authorities. The funding allocated for 2018/19 is £23,170.

This policy has been designed with consideration of The Human Rights Act 1998 and The Equality Act 2010.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

The Council faces severe financial challenges over the coming years as a result of the austerity measures implemented by the Government and subsequent reductions to public sector funding. It is estimated that Wokingham Borough Council will be required to make budget reductions in excess of £20m over the next three years and all Executive decisions should be made in this context.

	How much will it Cost/ (Save)	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1)	The council has decided to continue to provide funds to run its scheme from general funds. For 2018/19 £23,170 has been approved.	Yes. No further awards will be made if funding is exhausted in year.	
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	Not yet known		
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	Not yet known		

Cross-Council Implications
During the initial development of this Policy, other Council service areas were consulted to ensure that this scheme was complimentary to but did not overlap with any similar provision in those service areas. The suggested amendments outlined above do not change that position.

SUMMARY OF CONSULTATION RESPONSES	
Director – Corporate Services	No major changes to policy that required consultation. Changes include updating of financial years, finances/funding Director and Head of Service have reviewed policy changes and had the opportunity to comment on.
Monitoring Officer	No comments received
Leader of the Council	No comments received

List of Background Papers
Local Welfare Provision Review (November 2014); EIA;

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