

# Agenda Item IMD15

## INDIVIDUAL EXECUTIVE MEMBER DECISION

REFERENCE IMD: IMD 2021/15

<b>TITLE</b>	Local Welfare Provision Policy
<b>DECISION TO BE MADE BY</b>	Executive Member for Finance and Housing - John Kaiser
<b>DATE, MEETING ROOM and TIME</b>	11 May 2021 Council Chamber at 10.40am (Please see front sheet for attendance details)
<b>WARD</b>	None Specific;
<b>DIRECTOR / KEY OFFICER</b>	Deputy Chief Executive - Graham Ebers

### **PURPOSE OF REPORT (Inc Strategic Outcomes)**

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

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

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.

### **RECOMMENDATION**

That the Executive Member for Finance and Housing:

- 1) Approve the Policy amendments to be implemented from 11th May 2021. Amendments are to financial year, job title and confirmation of funding details;
- 2) Agrees with the proposal that going forward the policy only needs formal sign off by Executive Member should there be any fundamental changes to the policy or award criteria, excluding those described above.

### **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 interest of fairness the Council will operate an internal review procedure for appeals in a non-discriminatory way.

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.

A LWP award will normally be an urgent, one-off provision used as a short-term fix to prevent a long-term problem, and 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 into the Borough from care or prison, or those already here, to remain in their community,
- signposting to the best organisation to assist with needs.

The purpose of this revised Policy is to update financial year, Executive Member title, job titles and funding details. The criteria and claims process remain unchanged from previously agreed policy.

## **Background**

The Welfare Reform Act 2012 (the Act) ended the 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 1<sup>st</sup> 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 does not replace the support mechanisms and budgets that exist elsewhere within local authorities. The funding allocated for 2021/22 is £23,170.

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

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## **Business Case (including Analysis of Issues)**

The Council considers that it is in the best interests of the community to run a Local Welfare Provision (LWP) scheme to ensure there is some assistance to our most vulnerable residents.

Protecting our vulnerable residents forms part of the duties and responsibilities of various departments and partners. With the emergency financial provision through LWP we aim to further assist vulnerable people who may be in crisis or an emergency situation 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.

## FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

*The Council faces severe funding pressures, particularly in the face of the COVID-19 crisis. It is therefore imperative that Council resources are focused on the vulnerable and on its highest priorities.*

	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 decided to provide funds to run its scheme from general funds. For 2021/22 £23,170 was approved	Yes. No further awards will be made if funding is exhausted in year	Revenue
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	Not yet known	WBC will need to decide if it wishes to operate a LWP scheme for 22/23 and if so, fund accordingly	Revenue
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	Not yet known	WBC will need to decide if it wishes to operate a LWP scheme for 23/24 and if so, fund accordingly	Revenue

<b>Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision</b>
None

<b>Cross-Council Implications</b>
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 do not change that position

<b>Public Sector Equality Duty</b>
Due regard has been given to WBC's duties under the Equality Act 2010

<b>SUMMARY OF CONSULTATION RESPONSES</b>	
<b>Director – Resources and Assets</b>	No major changes to policy that required consultation. Director and Assistant Director have reviewed policy changes and had the opportunity to comment on.
<b>Monitoring Officer</b>	Consulted with MO, nothing to add
<b>Leader of the Council</b>	Email sent 13 <sup>th</sup> April 2021

<b>Reasons for considering the report in Part 2</b>
N/A

<b>List of Background Papers</b>
Revised WBC Local Welfare Provision Policy

<b>Contact</b> Nicky Thomas	<b>Service</b> Income and Assessments, Resources & Assets
<b>Telephone No</b> 0118 974 6000	<b>Email</b> nicky.thomas@wokingham.gov.uk

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