

Agenda Item IMD19

INDIVIDUAL EXECUTIVE MEMBER DECISION REFERENCE IMD: 2016/19

TITLE	Approval of 16/17 Local Welfare Provision Policy.
DECISION TO BE MADE BY	Anthony Pollock, Executive Member for Economic Development and Finance.
DATE AND TIME	22 April 2016 at 8.35am
WARD	non specific
DIRECTOR	Graham Ebers, Director of Resources and Finance
REPORT TO BE PUBLISHED ON	14 April 2016
VENUE	Room GF3, Council Offices, Shute End

OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY

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

From 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. The scheme is cash-limited to the amount of the funding provided by Wokingham Borough Council. It doesn't replace the support mechanisms and budgets that exist elsewhere within local authorities. The funding allocated by Wokingham Borough Council for 2016/2017 is £20,000 which is in line with the expenditure in 2015/2016.

This policy was designed with a view to using funding for the similar purposes as previously met by the DWP. Approval and implementation of the Policy therefore benefits the most vulnerable members of our community where there is some emergency or significant financial need for them to receive financial assistance to meet ordinary living expenses.

RECOMMENDATION

The Executive Member for Economic Development and Finance approves the draft Policy amendments to be implemented from 22nd April 2016.

SUMMARY OF REPORT

Wokingham Borough Council considers that it is in the best interests of the community to run a Local Welfare Provision (LWP) scheme utilising the funding allocated by the Wokingham Borough Council. The existing scheme was created through wide ranging internal and external consultation and was reviewed in August 2014 based on analysis

of claims experience since April 2013.

The purpose of this revised Policy is to update funding details and other minor changes. The criteria and claims process remain unchanged from previously agreed policy. Each case will be treated strictly on its merits and all applicants will be treated equally and fairly when the scheme is administered.

The responsibility for LWP is contained within the portfolio of the Executive Member for Economic Development and Finance. It falls under the provisions of an Individual Executive Member Decision for the proposed Policy to be adopted.

Background

The Welfare Reform Act 2012 ended 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).

From 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 was initially allocated to Wokingham Borough Council for each year of the initial two years (2013/14 and 2014/15) at £77,213 by the DWP. The scheme for 2016/2017 is proposed to be cash limited to £20,000. It doesn't replace the support mechanisms and budgets that exist elsewhere within local authorities.

In developing the original Policy, account was taken of other forms of statutory and discretionary financial assistance that are available across the Council. These include:

- Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP);
- Section 17 Funding (available through Children's Services);
- Rent Deposits & Rent in Advance (available through Housing Needs)

The DWP have not defined how such an LWP Policy may be written or operated. It is a matter entirely for each local authority to compile their own scheme reflecting local needs and priorities. For Wokingham Borough Council claims on this fund tend to represent emergency situations for each applicant. They typically need short term or one-off assistance for household related expenditure to meet a specific need. This may arise where some unforeseen event has occurred for which they have no funds.

In developing the original Policy an extensive consultation exercise was undertaken involving CLT and many internal Departments/Services. External agencies such as welfare rights advisors (e.g. CAB; Reading Welfare Rights), support agencies (e.g. Age UK; Transform) as well as service providers (e.g. Job Centre Plus; Food Banks). All comments received were taken into account. A full Equality Impact Assessment was also completed. This is not affected by the proposed changes set out in this report which are minor and largely administrative.

Local Welfare Provision is administered within the Assessments Service of Finance. It therefore sits alongside the administration and determination of similar financially based claims for housing costs support (rent and council tax). That service also provides wider welfare benefits advice, including DHP awards, so can determine whether there is any likely other funding or support that a claimant may access as an alternative source of assistance.

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 will allocate £20,000 in government grants to cover the cost of awards made. (16/17)	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 for 17/18 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 for 17/18 and if so, fund accordingly	Revenue

Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision

The Council has not been provided with any specific administration grant for this scheme. Therefore administration is undertaken by the Customer Welfare Team (within the Assessments Service) in order to minimise any cost implications to the Council. This team have successfully carried out the assessment of claims and monitoring of spend since 13/14.

Cross-Council Implications (how does this decision impact on other Council services, including property and priorities?)

During development of the original 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.

Provision of a Policy to use the allocated funds provided by Wokingham Borough Council for its intended purpose is seen as a way to maximise support for the most vulnerable residents in the borough. This helps mitigate or reduce calls for other statutory support services via the Council which may otherwise result in higher costs being faced.

SUMMARY OF CONSULTATION RESPONSES

Director – Finance and Resources	No major changes to policy that required public consultation. Changes include updating of roles, financial years,
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	finances/funding. Director and Head of Service have reviewed policy changes and had the opportunity to comment on.
Monitoring Officer	Made aware but no specific comments
Leader of the Council	"I fully support these updated proposals."

List of Background Papers
Revised WBC LWP Policy;

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