



Review of Local Assistance Scheme

SUMMARY

- 1.1 The Local Assistance Scheme – LAS – administered by the Council from 1 April 2013 replaced the discretionary elements of the Department for Work and Pensions' Social Fund.
- 1.2 No new duty was placed on Local Authorities in respect of Local Assistance which gives the Council flexibility to creatively design emergency provision that meets local needs. As the funding is not guaranteed after 2014/15, it is important to continuously review the scheme to ensure sustainability of support to vulnerable residents.
- 1.3 This report sets out how the Council has flexed the scheme based on learning and insight to provide effective support to vulnerable residents whilst continuing to make effective use of all appropriate funding and support, including practical help.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 To note the changes made to the Local Assistance policy as set out in paragraphs 4.3 and 4.4.
- 2.2 To note the applications received and spend to date from the Local Assistance fund as detailed in appendix 2.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 To provide the Resources and Governance Board an update on the enhancements made to the LAS as requested on 8 July 2013.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 4.1 The LAS is a cashless scheme providing support for vulnerable residents who cannot meet their immediate short-term financial needs in an emergency. It also offers home start vouchers to help vulnerable people return to, or remain in, the community. It aligns with existing services in Derby to make better use of funding. Cabinet agreed a LAS policy on 20 March 2013.
- 4.2 The LAS funding must be carefully managed to balance budget and demand and the Council must react to learning as the scheme develops and matures. To facilitate this Cabinet delegated authority to make necessary amendments to the scheme to the Director of Customer Management in conjunction with the Cabinet Member for Business, Finance and Democracy.
- 4.3 Learning began within the first few weeks of delivering the scheme as insight about the applicants and their circumstances became clearer. A formal review was conducted in July. This review included analysis of the reasons why applications were unsuccessful and, where appropriate, changes to the criteria were made. The following enhancements have been made:
- Top-up payments for utilities cards/keys
 - Local connection criteria for those fleeing violence and hate crime removed
 - An income and expenditure assessment tool created in the Lagan system
 - Provision of *Home Start* vouchers for applicants who have recently left hospital
 - Increased partnership work with third sector to provide *Home Start* goods and services
 - Mandatory budgeting advice for those receiving an LAS award
 - Quality Assurance inspections for high value *Home Start* awards
 - Maintain a back-up supply of dried and tinned goods in the Council House
 - Provision of food parcels for people subject to a benefit disallowance or sanction
 - Monitoring LAS spending in order to consider transfer of LAS funds to bolster Discretionary Housing Payments should it prove necessary to increase that discretionary fund and give more priority to residents at risk of losing their home

- 4.4 A further review, in September 2013, was undertaken in response to recommendations contained in the Children's Society report - Nowhere to Turn (2013) – which led to the following changes to the scheme:
- Removing the requirement to be on a means-tested benefit opening up access to applicants on other benefits
 - Providing all applicants, who get through to the interview stage, with a minimum award of a food parcel
 - Removing the limit of two applications per calendar year for food/utilities
 - Removing the question relating to “family financial support” from the initial eligibility criteria
 - Setting aside funding to provide targeted crisis support for families with No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF)
 - To recognise the Hope Centre as a trusted assessment organisation for LAS on a trial basis of 3 months with the aim of rolling this out to other trusted third sector partners if successful.
- 4.5 The LAS policy has been updated to reflect the changes and a link to it is contained in this report. A further review is now underway to assess the impact of the summer holidays, the reduction in housing refuges across the city and the demand for utilities as a consequence of increased gas and electricity tariffs.
- 4.6 The scheme has been designed to add value and ensure that appropriate sources of help are offered to the applicant if other needs are identified during the application process, see appendix 3 for details of referrals and signposting.
- 4.7 A proportion of the LAS budget will be set aside to provide targeted assistance to vulnerable residents throughout the winter months. This assistance will be delivered through the Council's third sector partners and will include the provision of shelter and hot meals.

OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

5.1 Not applicable

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This report has been approved by the following officers:

Legal officer Financial officer Human Resources officer Estates/Property officer Service Director(s) Other(s)	Not Applicable Toni Nash Not Applicable Not Applicable Not Applicable Neil Sheard – Service Transition Manager
For more information contact: Background papers: List of appendices:	Kath Gruber 01332 643777 kath.gruber@derby.gov.uk Discretionary Welfare Payments report dated 8 July 2013. Link to updated LAS policy: http://www.derby.gov.uk/media/DerbyCityCouncil-Local-Assistance-Scheme-Revised-Policy-Sept-2013.pdf Appendix 1 – Implications Appendix 2 - Applications/Spend LAS Appendix 3 – Referrals/Signposting

IMPLICATIONS

Financial and Value for Money

- 1.1 Local Assistance Scheme - Derby City Council allocation:

Year	Programme Funding	Administration Funding
2012/13	Nil	£9,866
2013/14	£986,595	£208,475
2014/15	£986,595	£191,090

Legal

- 2.1 Local Assistance has been developed in response to the Welfare Reform Act 2012.

Personnel

- 3.1 The LAS is delivered by the Customer Management department with an increased resource provided by new burdens funding.

Equalities Impact

- 4.1 Equality impact assessment has been conducted.

Health and Safety

- 5.1 Customer Management employees have been trained in "delivering difficult messages".

Environmental Sustainability

- 6.1 None

Property and Asset Management

- 7.1 None

Risk Management

- 8.1 None

Corporate objectives and priorities for change

- 9.1 Changes arising from the Welfare Reform Act are linked to the Council's priority of delivering good quality services that meet local needs.

Applications/Spend Analysis – LAS

Table 1: Applications and Awards

Month	Applications	Awarded*	%	Awards				Average Award per applicant	Vouchers not collected
				Food	Home	Utility	Cost		
Apr-13	178	26	15%	25	4	0	£ 2,281.00	£ 87.73	4
May-13	237	25	11%	19	6	4	£ 2,806.50	£ 112.26	1
Jun-13	148	18	12%	16	1	3	£ 1,558.00	£ 86.56	3
Jul-13	206	22	11%	16	2	4	£ 1,859.00	£ 84.50	4
Aug-13	254	27	11%	21	5	2	£ 1,899.00	£ 70.33	3
Sep-13	230	40	17%	26	7	9	£ 4,319.00	£ 107.98	5
Oct-13	308	45	15%	40	5	11	£ 4,223.00	£ 93.84	4
Total	1561	203	13%	163	30	33	£18,945.50	£ 91.89	24

*Where criteria is met an award is made

Table 2: Analysis of applications not meeting LAS criteria

Month	Total Number of Applications	Criteria not met	%	Reason				
				No Qualifying Benefit	No Local Connection	Not In Crisis	Support already provided by Council	DWP Sanctions/Disallowances
Apr-13	178	152	85%	34	32	70	12	4
May-13	237	212	89%	64	37	110	0	1
Jun-13	148	130	88%	41	13	64	12	0
Jul-13	206	184	89%	55	29	76	21	3
Aug-13	254	227	89%	69	36	94	28	0
Sep-13	230	190	83%	58	30	79	23	0
Oct-13	308	263	85%	96	105	46	16	0
Total	1561	1358	87%	417	282	539	112	8

Table 3: Referrals to appropriate sources of help

Organisation Referred to	No. of people referred
Probation Trust/Unlock	14
Money Advice Service	272
Home Heat Helpline/Fuel Poverty Action	162
Derby Job Centre Plus (DWP)	182
Sure Start Maternity Help	54
Credit Union	190
Midland Community Finance (Loan)	22
Family Justice Centre/RELATE	14
New 2 U - YMCA furniture	41
Jubilee Project (DCM)	3
Citizens Advice	122
British Red Cross/DRAC	45
MIND	4
Other Local Authorities	42
Housing Benefits (DHP)	25
DCC CYP (NRPF)	14
DCC Housing Options	29
DCC Adult Social Worker	12
DCC Personal Budgets (AHH)	27
Multiple Referrals/Not identified	84
Total	1358

Table 4: Local Assistance Commitments

Items	Amounts
LAS projected* award costs	£ 34,907.32
Derby's Working Scheme	£ 249,062.00
Targeted Crisis Support (NRPF)	£ 100,000.00
Support Winter Months	£ 50,000.00
Funding for LAS yr3 and 4	£ 552,625.68
Total Costs	£ 433,969.32

*Based on an increased award rate of 20% because of the enhancements made

Referrals and Signposting

The following referrals are made by the LAS team after addressing the client's immediate need with food and/or utilities:

1. Discretionary Housing Payments – this scheme is administered by the Council and provides financial assistance for those on Housing Benefits to meet the shortfall between their Housing Benefits and rent liability
2. Money Advice Service (MAS) – this national organisation provides key budgeting advice.
3. Jubilee Project – this local project, run by Derby City Mission, provides a personalised program to help individuals out of the debt cycle and back into work.
4. Adult Health and Housing Team social workers if it appears that the applicant is at risk.
5. Housing Options if the applicant is homeless or the crisis has been caused by issues with housing and/or landlords.
6. Children's and Young People's social workers if there is a concern the applicant may be struggling to provide adequately for children in their care.
7. Government's Healthy Start scheme if the applicant is pregnant or has children under the age of four.
8. Home Heat Helpline and the Fuel Poverty Action Group for support in claiming a grant from the utility providers (if the applicant does not have a utility top up card/key).
9. Assigned drug or alcohol worker where appropriate to inform them of the application and awards made.
10. Red Cross Advice worker if the applicant has No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF).