

Bath & North East Somerset Council

DECISION MAKER	Councillor David Bellotti & Councillor Paul Crossley	
DECISION DATE:	On or after 9th March 2013	EXECUTIVE FORWARD PLAN REFERENCE:
		E 2525
TITLE:	Social Fund Abolition – Policy Options	
WARD:	All	
AN OPEN PUBLIC ITEM		
List of attachments to this report: Appendix 1 – Details the current Welfare Provision Administered by the Department For Work & Pensions Appendix 2 – Details the options considered Appendix 3 – The Recommended Welfare Support Scheme		

1 THE ISSUE

- 1.1 With effect from the 1st April 2013 the Government is abolishing elements of the Social Fund currently administered by the Department for Work & Pensions and allocating funding to Councils based on their estimated awards for Community Care Grants and Crisis Loans

2 RECOMMENDATION

The Leader of the Council and the Cabinet Member for Resources agree that:

- 2.1 The option for providing local welfare support as set out in Appendix 3 is adopted and implemented with effect from the 1st April 2013
- 2.2 That research is carried out across the Council in order to bring together a co-ordinated gateway for customers needing to access discretionary funds delivering Welfare Provision by the end of March 2014

3 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 The funding for each Local Authority has been awarded based on DWP estimates and is confirmed for the next two years.
- 3.2 In Bath & North East Somerset we have been awarded set up funding of £2,493; Programme funding of £249,260 per annum and Administration funding of £52,670 per annum.
- 3.3 There are no prescribed rules for using this funding although it is allocated for the purpose of Local Welfare Provision.
- 3.4 The admin funds and programme funds are cash limited and the scheme will need to be provided within these limits and within the use of existing resources

4 CORPORATE OBJECTIVES

- 4.1 A scheme which supports local welfare provision for our most vulnerable residents does help towards delivering all corporate objectives when properly targeted.
 - *Promoting independence and positive lives for everyone*
 - *Creating neighbourhoods where people are proud to live*
 - *Building a stronger economy*

5 THE REPORT

- 5.1 The abolition of Social Fund and the transfer of resources to Local Government is a huge opportunity for Council's to target those most at risk from the impacts of our current economic situation and adverse impacts of Welfare Reforms.
- 5.2 An explanation of how the current Social Fund has been provided in the past by Department for Work & Pensions and in-particular the aspects relating to Community Care Grants and Crisis loans which are most relevant to this report can be found at Appendix 1.
- 5.3 At its meeting on the 8th November 2013, Members recommended that any scheme we develop with the money provided by the abolition of the Social Fund should target those most impacted by the introduction of our new localised Council Tax Support Scheme.
- 5.4 Officers of the Council have in addition consulted with officials at the Department for Work and Pensions; colleagues across local government; local service providers and internal service providers in order to understand the options in relation to the provision of local welfare support and these initial findings have been discussed with the lead Cabinet Member for Resources and are reproduced at Appendix 2.
- 5.5 The preferred option taking in to account the above considerations for the delivery of local welfare support with effect from the 1st April 2013 within Bath & North East Somerset has been further developed and is described in detail at Appendix 3.
- 5.6 This service will be delivered by our Customer services team and in consultation with partners. Assessment will be carried out against the agreed criteria and we aim to develop provision of support over time. We will also be working closely with

other Council providers including the Connecting Families team to ensure an appropriate and consistent gateway to support those most in need.

6 RISK MANAGEMENT

- 6.1 The report author and Lead Cabinet member have fully reviewed the risk assessment related to the issue and recommendations, in compliance with the Council's decision making risk management guidance.
- 6.2 Key issues of consideration are that the scheme is introduced on time and targets those genuinely in need of support. Appropriate measures will be in place to prevent fraud and abuse of the system. Financial controls will be in place to monitor spend within specified limits and over time further work will be done to align support mechanisms both internally and externally to achieve greater efficiency and value for money.

7 EQUALITIES

- 7.1 An Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) has been completed. Adverse impacts were identified and have been justified/mitigated.
- 7.2 Key adverse impact is that the funding available is less than existing costs and the client group(s) being served are growing
- 7.3 This is a cash limited funding stream and therefore eligibility has been aligned to those most vulnerable members of our community and to our Council tax Support Scheme in the first instance.
- 7.4 We aim to mitigate impacts by developing a more coherent approach towards the administration of discretionary funds and by working closely with partners and advice agencies.

8 RATIONALE

- 8.1 The preferred option is recommended as it takes account of the advice of relevant stakeholders and members, it seeks to minimise the alleged abuse of the existing system operated by the Department For Works and Pensions on the basis that it will be a non-cash award and it will enable a vital gateway for those most in need to access the right services.

9 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 9.1 A number of various options have been considered, including a “do nothing” scenario. It is thought that the preferred option delivers the most appropriate solution for stakeholders and customers at this time and within the timescales available. It also enables for some of the other options to be built in to further evaluation and improvements.
- 9.2 These developments should include the removal of duplication in other discretionary funded schemes. The most appropriate provision of Commissioned support and the wider scope of third party referrals.

10 CONSULTATION

10.1 *Cabinet members; Trades Unions; Policy Development and Scrutiny Panel; Staff; Other B&NES Services; Service Users; Community Interest Groups; Stakeholders/Partners; Other Public Sector Bodies; Section 151 Finance Officer; Chief Executive; Monitoring Officer*

10.2 Timescales for the determination and implementation of a new scheme have been short but consultation has been on-going for the last six months, with one officer devoting time to this project to attend meetings with a wide range of stake holders, internal and external colleagues and potential suppliers.

10.3 Updates have been given at various workshops and as part of the budget setting process.

10.4 Draft options were circulated to Strategic Management Team and the Executive Member for Resources for comment and detailed impacts of the wider Welfare Reforms to Senior Management and other Groups have highlighted the potential introduction and use of these funds to offset impacts for our most vulnerable.

11 ISSUES TO CONSIDER IN REACHING THE DECISION

11.1 *Social Inclusion; Customer Focus; Human Resources; Young People; Human Rights; Corporate; Health & Safety; Impact on Staff; Other Legal Considerations*

12 ADVICE SOUGHT

12.1 The Council's Monitoring Officer (Divisional Director – Legal and Democratic Services) and Section 151 Officer (Divisional Director - Finance) have had the opportunity to input to this report and have cleared it for publication.

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Sponsoring Cabinet Member	<i>Councillor David Bellotti</i>
Background papers	<i>None</i>
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