

Appendix 'A'

Care and Urgent Needs Support Scheme Policy

1 Introduction

- 1.1 In October 2010 the Government published the White Paper 'Universal Credit: welfare that works'. The White Paper detailed the Government's proposals for wide-ranging welfare reform which have subsequently been included within the Welfare Reform Act. Included within the proposals was reform of the Discretionary Social Fund which is currently administered by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). This is to be replaced with discretionary local provision, administered by top-tier or unitary local authorities from April 2013.
- 1.2 The Government has stated that it believes the service is better delivered locally and this will empower local communities to better identify and meet the needs of the most vulnerable. It has also identified that through localising the service it may be possible to improve the quality of decision making and to integrate with locally designed programmes that can provide complementary avenues of assistance.
- 1.3 The elements of the Discretionary Social Fund that will be replaced with local provision are:
 - Crisis Loans.
 - Community Care Grants
- 1.4 Other elements of the Social Fund such as maternity and funeral grants and alignment loans will remain the responsibility of DWP.
- 1.5 Current DWP policy states that Crisis Loans are to meet immediate needs such as general living expenses or items needed following a disaster and entitlement is not dependent upon receipt of a benefit. Community Care Grants (CCG's) are non-repayable grants to enable vulnerable people to live in the community and are conditional upon receipt of an income related benefit.
- 1.6 This document sets out the County Council's policy for it's new scheme, to be called the Care and Urgent Needs Support Scheme, including an outline of how the service will be delivered by One Connect Limited.

2 Purpose of the Scheme

- 2.1 The purpose of the new Care and Urgent Needs Support Scheme is to replace those elements of the Social Fund which will no longer be administered by the DWP: specifically Community Care Grants and Crisis Loans. The scheme is the responsibility of Lancashire County Council and it will be delivered on behalf of the Council by One Connect Limited.
- 2.2 The scheme will seek to assist vulnerable people in meeting their needs for subsistence or financial support where they are unable to meet their immediate short term needs or where they require assistance to maintain their independence within the community.
- 2.3 The scheme will seek to ensure that there is high quality, consistent decision making within agreed service levels.
- 2.4 The policy seeks to treat each applicant fairly and equitably with full consideration given to their circumstances. The scheme will seek to utilise alternative avenues of funding where practical and possible; this will help to protect the remaining funds for people in need.
- 2.5 Consideration will be given to the nature, extent and urgency of the need in every case that is considered.
- 2.6 The policy seeks to meet the particular needs of the county's most vulnerable residents and is developed and administered in accordance with public sector equality and child poverty duties.
- 2.7 In addition to receiving applications from residents and their representatives it is proposed that the service provider will seek to use intelligence-led proactive measures to identify and target support to those most in need. This may be supplemented by targeted campaigns and outreach activities.
- 2.8 The policy framework within which the service is delivered will seek to facilitate joined up working with district councils and other agencies including not for profit organisations. It will provide an inter referral process which makes effective use of relevant available local services and funding provision.
- 2.9 It is not intended that the scheme will extend to those who have access to sufficient income, savings or suitable forms of credit.
- 2.10 The scheme will not cover needs which are more appropriately addressed by other discretionary funds or benefits; specifically it will not meet needs that should be addressed by localised Council Tax Support or Discretionary Housing Payments. Where appropriate, claimants will be referred to their District Council or the DWP for support in these areas.

3 Targeted Scenarios for Support

3.1 The policy will seek to identify and prioritise those most in need. It will aim to target those within the community who have been identified as the most vulnerable and in need of urgent financial assistance or support. The scheme will consider issuing awards under two types of need to those people who require immediate support and to people who require assistance to establish or maintain a home in the community.

3.2 Groups most likely to require this form of assistance may include (this list is not exhaustive):

- Families in need of emergency financial support
- Homeless people or rough sleepers
- Older people at risk of harm
- People fleeing domestic abuse
- Young people leaving care
- People moving out of institutional or residential care
- Ex offenders leaving prison or detention centres
- Chronically or terminally ill people
- People with alcohol or drug issues
- People with learning difficulties
- People with mental health issues

3.3 Applications for awards of immediate financial assistance may include people who:

- Have no essential food
- Need essential goods associated with infants/children
- Have no heating
- Require help with emergency travel costs
- Have suffered a major upheaval or disaster
- Present themselves as requiring assistance to cover living expenses until they receive their first payment of benefit or salary, where this is not met by other benefits. This would normally result in referral to DWP who will retain responsibility for this area.

3.4 Assistance to establish or maintain a new home in the community may be considered for people who, for example (this list is not exhaustive):

- Have been in long term care
- Have left prison
- Have fled domestic abuse
- Move to supported accommodation/independent living

3.5 These scenarios are not exhaustive and there are additional circumstances where support would be considered.

3.6 Awards could be to help with the provision of:

- Beds
- Bedding
- White goods
- Provision of heating appliances
- Essential domestic appliances/cookware
- Essential domestic furniture
- Emergency transport costs
- Redecoration following a disaster or due to related health needs.

- 3.7 Awards would not normally be given for:
- A television or satellite cost or repair
 - Installation of a telephone or telephone line
 - Housing costs or arrears of rent
 - Costs normally met by state support or benefits including Universal Credit
 - Debts
 - Motor vehicle expenses
 - TV license
 - Where the applicant has access to sufficient income or savings
 - Costs associated with care provision
 - Shortfalls in Council Tax Support awards or reductions in Housing Benefit including those associated with the social sector size criteria.
- 3.8 The policy will seek to provide holistic support, taking into account alternative local provision including Discretionary Housing Payments, Disability Related Expenditure allowances within social care charging policy, Council Tax Support and Disabled Facilities Grant. The scheme will actively seek partnership arrangements with local organisations that can provide assistance such as food banks and furniture re-use centres. It will endeavour to work with local businesses to procure goods and services to support an accessible, value for money service.
- 3.9 The policy will also seek to ensure that the support is sustainable. People who submit repeat applications or are identified as in need of requiring another form of assistance will be referred to an appropriate local advice service for support such as budget or debt advice or counselling services. Different support services will be encouraged to work in concert to deliver an approach which would prevent repeat applications.
- 3.10 There will normally be a limit on repeat applications for living expenses to a maximum of 2 in any rolling 12 month period .

4 Eligibility

4.1 People who may be eligible are those:

- Ordinarily resident in Lancashire

And who are:

- Aged 16 or over
- On a low income and without access to sufficient funds to meet their immediate needs
- Leaving care
- Requiring support to stay in the community
- Able to demonstrate that they are without immediate resource to meet the basic needs of themselves and / or their dependents.
- Normally in receipt of Income Support, Income based Job Seekers Allowance (JSA), Income related Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) or Pension Credit (Guarantee Credit only).

4.2 Under new data sharing powers it is anticipated that those administering the scheme will have access to DWP data in relation to income. It is proposed that the authority considers available data on income and savings to determine if a person is eligible for an award.

4.3 The scheme will endeavour to use proactive measures to identify and target support towards those most in need, including targeted campaigns and outreach activities.

4.4. Where the person has available savings that are adequate to meet the needs identified, the application may be refused.

4.5 All requests will be considered on an individual basis with due account given to the vulnerability and personal circumstances of each applicant.

4.6 The amount of remaining available funding will be relevant to the prioritisation of awards and this will require that expenditure is reviewed on a monthly basis. In these circumstances regard will be paid to whether an individual applicant has protected characteristics as set out in the public sector equality duty.

4.7 The policy will seek to facilitate working with district councils to identify and provide a referral route for potential beneficiaries of the scheme.

5 The Application Process

- 5.1 The application process will be clear, transparent and accessible, allowing people to request support through a number of access channels.
- 5.2 Applications made from applicants' appointees or their representatives (subject to customer consent) will be considered. It is anticipated that referrals will be made from local authority support services, Adult and Community Services, Children and Young Peoples Services, district councils' homelessness functions and other appropriate outside agencies such as the Probation Service, hostels and advice organisations.
- 5.3 The application process will be designed to provide consistent and fair decision making by gathering appropriate data and supporting information.
- 5.4 The application and the process will be flexible to avoid undue delays and reflect that some awards require more detailed information. Applications will primarily be made via the phone. Applications will also be accepted via face to face interviews.
- 5.5 An on-line referral process will be made available to representatives of applicants.
- 5.6 Case management processes and turnaround times will be structured to ensure rapid high quality decision making. Applications for emergency assistance will be prioritised with service levels in place for agreed timescales for the decision making, payment of awards and a review process. Service level agreements will be defined in the detailed service design.
- 5.7 Repeat applications will be considered on a case by case basis however a limit will be placed on the maximum awards within any financial year. People with a history of repeat applications will be referred to advice for sustainable support such as budgeting or debt advice.

6 Methods of Assistance

- 6.1 The scheme will seek to provide appropriate methods of awarding support and allow the authority to decide to whom the award should be made based upon the individual circumstances of each applicant.
- 6.2 Awards will be made to the appropriate party which may include:
- The applicant
 - Their partner
 - An appointee or authorised representative
 - Directly to a service or goods provider.
- 6.3 Appropriate methods of payment include:
- Vouchers for food
 - Payments to suppliers of suitable goods or services
 - Pre payment cards for goods/heating
 - Goods from local suppliers
 - Goods and services from non-profit making organisations
 - Travel vouchers
- 6.4 Cash payments will not normally be made .
- 6.5 The delivery method of providing support will be flexible in how, when and where awards will be given to reflect the individual requirements of each application.
- 6.6 Support will not be provided by way of financial loans.
- 6.7 The scheme will determine a maximum for awards for both living expenses and particular items.

7 Rights of Review

7.1 The applicant or their authorised representative will have the right to request that the decision be reviewed. However, as this is a non statutory scheme and not part of the national benefits framework there is no right of appeal through the Tribunal Service.

7.2 Reasons for a review of a decision could include:

- Award or repeat award refused
- Method of assistance
- Amount of award
- To whom the assistance is awarded.

When submitting a review of a decision, people will be invited to explain their reasons why they feel the original decision should be reviewed to support their request.

7.3 The scheme will include a structured review process. This will operate within the spirit of the policy, allowing people who disagree with a decision to request a review and to provide additional information or evidence which supports this request.

7.4 The review process will have two stages:

Stage 1; All requests to review a decision from an applicant or their representative to be considered and notified within service levels to be agreed in the detailed service design. This will be reviewed by a different officer than made the original decision.

Stage2; If the applicant is still not satisfied with the outcome of the review, they may request a further review within an agreed timescales of being notified of the review outcome. The process will seek to ensure that stage 2 reviews are considered by a senior officer taking into account all the information and evidence included in the review and the reasonableness of the decision made. The decision will be notified in writing or via an appropriate format and within a fixed timescale.

7.5 The applicant or their representative also has the right to make a complaint to the Local Government Ombudsman.

8 Financial Constraints and Controls

- 8.1 Central Government funding arrangements will be cash limited taking into account the historic data available on past social fund payments.
- 8.2 Annual funding is finite, and close and regular monitoring of the scheme will be required. In the event that there is a local emergency (for example flood or fire) affecting several households, the authority may wish to review available funds.
- 8.3 ICT systems will be implemented which provide detailed and robust management information to allow continuous monitoring and real time information in relation to:
 - issuing of awards
 - methods of payment
 - projected expenditure based on current demand
 - awards made
 - equalities data
 - speed of awards and reviews.
- 8.4 All financial management will be subject to monthly and quarterly reporting and review and awards will be made on the basis of available funds.
- 8.5 The policy will seek to deter fraudulent claims and false statements ensuring appropriate controls are in place and swift action is taken where required. Consideration will also be given to reducing the potential for duplicate applications within alternative support provision or neighbouring authorities.
- 8.6 The policy will seek to minimise the potential for fraudulent applications which in turn will maximise the limited funding available for those most in need.

