

## **Briefing Note – Corporate Resources**

**Subject: Local Welfare Assistance**

**Date: 30<sup>th</sup> July 2013**

**To: DACHS Scrutiny Committee**

**From: Kim Ellis, Senior Team Manager , Dudley Council Plus, Customer Services.**

### **Purpose of Briefing Note**

To outline for Members of the DACHS Scrutiny Committee the Local Welfare Assistance scheme, who the scheme is intended to assist and how awards are fulfilled.

### **What is the Local Welfare Assistance scheme?**

The Local Welfare Assistance scheme (LWA) is a discretionary award scheme, set up in April 2013 to provide the following assistance;

- Crisis Awards - these awards provide short term access to essential items i.e. food, heating, lighting, clothing, white goods and furniture.
- Community Care Awards - these aim to help people remain in the community or move back into the community by providing a range of standard items such as beds, bedding, furniture or white goods.

Prior to April 2013 similar assistance was provided by the Department of Work & Pensions (DWP) in the form of crisis loans and community care grants, known as the "Social Fund".

Cabinet approval for the LWA transitional policy was given in February 2013, the scheme is administered by Benefits Services and Dudley Council Plus.

### **Qualifying criteria and exclusions.**

The scheme has both qualifying criteria and exclusions, these are detailed in the LWA transitional policy document .

### **Finance**

Dudley received the following funding for 2013/14

- Admin & set up; £153,402
- Award fund; £693,159

### **How to apply**

Customers can apply by telephone using either a free phone or local rate number. LWA advisors will discuss the customer's circumstances and either signpost to alternative sources of help e.g DWP or complete an application form. Alternatively customers can apply on line. Applications from third parties e.g support workers, are actively encouraged.

### **Assessment and decision making process**

Core eligibility and scheme exclusions are checked and the customer's individual circumstances and needs are considered. All awards are made on their individual merits considering the income, expenditure, household and other circumstances of the applicant. Consideration is given to whether the needs could be met elsewhere. Where appropriate, supporting evidence will be requested from other agencies. Customers making repeated applications or who are having difficulty with budgeting may be referred to other agencies for assistance.

### **How awards are made**

Awards are not made in cash. Food is awarded using either referrals for Black Country Food bank or supermarket food vouchers, fuel is awarded using pay point top up vouchers, appliances are provided direct from a white goods supplier and the third sector provides furniture, household items and clothing. This award mechanism is mirrored throughout the country with 81% of local authorities choosing not to give cash.

### **Current position in Dudley**

In the first quarter of 2013-2014 we received 1829 enquiries, resulting in 427 applications being submitted. Of the submitted applications 270 awards have been made.

Total spend in this quarter is £28928.63, with Crisis awards totalling £3528.69 and Community Care awards £25399.94.

Compared to DWP spending in previous years, LWA awards and spending in the first quarter has been less than anticipated. This is mirrored by our neighbouring local authorities, the decision not award cash may be a contributory factor. However it is anticipated that during the summer school holiday period we may see an increase in applications, due to children not receiving free school meals and the impact on household budgets. In addition the impact of other welfare reforms and increased household expenses during the winter months may also increase applications for crisis awards in the future.

