



# Buckinghamshire County Council Select Committee

Finance, Performance and Resources Select Committee

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## Report to the Finance, Performance and Resources Select Committee

<b>Title:</b>	Local Emergency Support
<b>Committee date:</b>	31 October 2013
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<b>Report signed off by Cabinet Member:</b>	Peter Hardy
<b>Electoral divisions affected:</b>	All Electoral Divisions

### Purpose of Agenda Item

- To consult on proposals to amend the Council's Local Emergency Support Policy which was agreed on 26.3.2013.
- To update on the Council's Local Emergency Support operation as this was a new requirement of all County Council's with effect from 1.4.2013.

### Background

The Welfare Reform Act 2012 received Royal Assent on 8<sup>th</sup> March 2012.

Part 3 'Other Benefit Changes' S70-73 provides "Section 138(1)(b) of the Social Security Contributions and Benefits Act 1992 (discretionary payments out of social fund) is repealed.

The Welfare Benefit Act 2012 abolished Community Care Grants and Crisis Loans and replaced them with a non-ring fenced grant to be paid to Local Authorities in England. Under the Local Government Act 2000, the Council has been expected to utilise the non-ring fenced grant to provide assistance and emergency provision.



The Minister of State for Pensions, Steve Webb MP wrote to Buckinghamshire County Council on 6<sup>th</sup> August 2012 advising indicative funding. The values were confirmed as the final settlement on 31st December 2012.

2012/2013	Set up funding	£4,795
2013/2014	Programme Funding	£479,510
	Administrative Funding	£101,324
2014/2015	Programme Funding	£479,510
	Administrative Funding	£92,874

All awards have been approved by the Council's Local Emergency Support Budget Decision Maker or their nominated representatives only.

Programme Funding use and Administrative Funding use has been reported on quarterly to the Service Director (Finance & Commercial Services)

Buckinghamshire County Council's Local Emergency Support solution has been in operation since 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2013.

The Council's Policy which received Cabinet Member approval on 26<sup>th</sup> March 2013 is attached within the Appendix.

Claimants contact the Council via the Contact Centre where Officers record details on the 'CRM' system. 1 FTE of temporary resource has been funded using Local Emergency Support programme funding so support additional workload.

2 FTE of Local Emergency Support Officers (seconded on Fixed Term Contracts) located within the Direct Services area of the Support Services Centre manage the referrals by reviewing the 'CRM' system on a daily basis.

Out of Hours support for residents in crisis is provided by the Council's Out of Hours Team using Local Emergency Support funding. To date there has been no demand out of normal working hours.

The focus of the Council's Local Emergency Support operation has been to:

- Fully understand each claimants personal and financial situation
- Maximise each claimants financial situation by signposting to eligible benefits and resources available to minimise dependency on crisis provision i.e. heating initiatives from Central Government (including Priority Services Register, Warm Home Discount Scheme), Rent Deposit / Rent Guarantee Schemes / Discretionary Housing Payments available from the relevant District Council, Budgeting Loans from the Department of Work & Pensions etc.
- Provision of resources to assist in the immediate crisis or emergency situation

- To prioritise support and assistance to those in need of food / heating / sanitary provisions
- To report any safeguarding concerns to AFW and CYPS Teams.

The Local Emergency Support Team have developed effective relationships with voluntary organisations, charities, CAB, food banks, Homelessness Organisations, Districts, Probation Service, Police Service, Job Centre Plus' and the Department of Work & Pensions to optimise support for Buckinghamshire claimants. The Local Emergency Support Officers plan to operate 'surgeries' within local Job Centre Plus offices to raise awareness of assisting those in crisis amongst JCP+ staff avoiding claimants being 'ping-ponged' between services and to assist claimants where possible.

The Team are also working closely with the Council's Policy Team to support the Welfare Benefit Reform Project with involvement and participation in various working groups.

Solutions provided directly by the Local Emergency Support are:

- Gift Cards for all major supermarkets enabling claimants to purchase fresh food items, sanitary items, nappies, clothing items etc.
- Postal Orders enabling claimants to draw cash at Post Offices to top up gas / electric accounts. The Council's Post Office Payout system has recently been extended to enable Local Emergency Support claimants to utilise this service.
- Second hand furniture from locally sourced suppliers.
- New furniture / electrical essentials from organisations such as Argos.

### Analysis of Operation to Date:

#### Local Emergency Support

Month	Amount	Progressive	% of total budget used
April	£3,061	£3,061	0.64%
May	£4,737	£7,798	1.63%
June	£6,128	£13,926	2.90%
July	£7,174	£21,100	4.40%
August	£8,744	£29,844	6.22%
Sept	£6,891	£36,736	7.66%
Oct	£10,964	£47,700	9.94%
Nov			0.00%
Dec			0.00%
Jan			0.00%
Feb			0.00%
Mar			0.00%
	<b>£47,700</b>		0.00%
		<b>Total budget</b>	479510

A dataset of 1,100 claims for assistance from the Council's Local Emergency Support Team was analysed in detail.

- The gender split across claims is 60% males / 40% female.
- In terms of age, 80% of males contacting the Council are aged between 25-64 with 77% of females being in the same age group.
- 15% of males seeking assistance were aged 19-24 with no requests from the 16-18 age group. 18% of females were aged 19-24 and we have received 2 requests from females in the 16-18 age category
- 15% of claims were made on behalf of couples, 85% for singles or lone parents.
- 25% of claims were made from households with dependent children.
- 37% of claims were made from households within Aylesbury, 31% were from Wycombe, 17% were from Chiltern with the remaining 15% divided across LU, SL, MK and UB postcode areas.
- 62% received a solution funded directly from Local Emergency Support monies. 25% of those who did not receive a funded solution could not be contacted in spite of the Team attempting to call on 2 separate occasions and writing to the address given by the claimant. The remaining claimants who were not issued with a directly funded solution were signposted to food banks, advised of their eligibility to benefits or other resources and provided with verbal and written instructions on how to do so, or advised that they no longer needed assistance.
- Of the 62% who received a solution funded from Local Emergency Support monies,  $\frac{3}{4}$  advised that food / sanitary items / nappies were their highest needs with assistance towards utilities the next highest. Assistance was further provided towards furniture, white goods, travel, moving cost needs.
- 55% of claimants are referred to the Local Emergency Support Team by the Department of Work & Pensions.
- The Officers receive 25-40 claims on a daily basis. Awards very much depend on individual circumstances as the Officers identify when the claimant will next receive a benefit or income and meet their specific needs up to that date. Depending on the size and needs of the household, Officers calculate food and or heating requirements per person and on a daily basis as per the Department of Work & Pensions daily limits.
- It is acknowledged that the weather has been particularly mild since April and the implementation of Local Emergency Support therefore the demand for assistance with utilities has been relatively low. We therefore anticipate a higher utilisation of

funding as claimants require fuel to heat their accommodation and cook hot food through the winter months.

Anecdotally, many claimants have advised the Local Emergency Support Team that they find themselves unable to purchase food or heat their households because they have received a sanction on their Department of Work & Pensions benefits. This means that some or all of their benefits have been suspended because they have failed to sign on, make contact with the Job Centre Plus etc. for some reason. We have been advised by our local Partnership Manager from the Department of Work & Pensions that benefit claimants have their commitment to receiving on-going payments made very clear at the inception of the claim. The Local Emergency Support Team do not attempt to bridge the claimant's benefit funding gap when determining assistance, their priority is to meet the household's priorities until benefits recommence i.e. providing funding for food or utilities across x days.

The Local Emergency Support Team have access to 'CIS' – Department of Work & Pensions benefits data to validate information provided by claimants and to ensure that they are providing relevant and factual advice on any further benefit eligibility.

## **Proposals:**

### **Proposal 1**

Our analysis confirmed that claimants are being directed to sources of assistance within the County from charities and voluntary groups etc. which has undoubtedly increased demand. To enable these organisations to assist as many residents in crisis as possible, it is proposed that the Policy is updated to include the use of funding for one off requests from these organisations. The analysis further indicates that there is a high likelihood of underspend in Programme Funding across 2013/2014 given demand levels to date even if volumes increase across the winter months thus enabling the Council to support and strengthen the infrastructure across the County.

Requests received to date requiring approval:

Aylesbury Vineyard (Food Bank) – Improvements to existing storage of donated food items provision of further storage and up cycling **£5,500**

One Can Trust (Food Bank) – Storage / office space / kitchen for cookery classes **£19,000**

Central Aid (Second hand furniture/ electrical items) – Operational costs of repairing donations / electrical testing of donations / delivery vehicle running costs **£900**

Wycombe Homeless Connection - a donation will enable them to offer 'honour loans' to young people who are offered YMCA accommodation. The loans are needed to pay a one-off service charge for which the young person is unable to claim Rent In Advance. Wycombe Homeless Connection advise that many young people repay the honour loans and these are recycled to enable them to help more young people. **£1,600**

Farnham Children's Centre – donation for stock to support the food bank they operate. Request made via Bucks Network Crisis Support Workshop. Contact there – Jo Sheppard. No monetary figure requested. Propose to donate £2,000 in the first instance. **£2,000**

The Local Emergency Support Team have held a number of networking meetings with key partners who support those in crisis. The Officers have promoted the funding to aid a wider population of residents in crisis who may not directly approach the Local Emergency Support Team but responses have been very limited to date. We also recognise that our partners' resources are geared towards front line response and not on the development of business cases.

The Officers are currently working with a number of homelessness organisations to identify how funding could support them with the provision of vouchers for hot food, blankets for their shelters etc.

Bucks Network have asked that we explore the possibility of creating a food bank for Aylesbury Vale North. If Proposal 1 is approved, we will pursue this request.

South Bucks District Council have asked that we explore the possibility of creating a food bank to assist their rural communities. If Proposal 1 is approved, we will pursue this request.

South Bucks District Council have also asked if we would consider one off funding to develop community based volunteer run information points. If Proposal 1 is approved, we will pursue this request.

## **Proposal 2**

It is also proposed that Local Emergency Support is not available to those seeking asylum or for whom an application for asylum has been refused. Applicants must have recourse to public funds and to satisfy the tests under Social Security Persons from Abroad legislation.

## **Proposal 3**

It is further proposed that Local Emergency Support funding will not be used where Section 17 of the Children's Act 1989 applies. Section 17 provides that it is the general duty of Local Authorities to safeguard and promote the welfare of children who are in need and to promote the upbringing of such children by their families by providing a range and level of services appropriate to those children's needs.

## **Resource implications**

- There are no additional financial or resource implications resulting from the proposals to amend the Council's Local Emergency Support Policy.

## Next steps

- It is recommended that the Cabinet Member for Resources & Finance agrees the proposals to amend the Council's Local Emergency Support Policy.
- If approved, the amendments will be applied immediately.

## Appendix

- The current Local Emergency Support Policy which was approved on 26.3.2013:

[..\..\..\..\FCSMT\Local Emergency Support\R05.13 Policy.pdf](#)

- The updated Local Emergency Support Policy including proposals highlighted above:

[..\..\..\..\FCSMT\Local Emergency Support\Local Emergency Support Fund Policy - Updated 1.11.2013.doc](#)

- Research collated by the Finance & Commercial Services Operations Manager on activity in other County Councils:

[..\..\..\..\FCSMT\Local Emergency Support\LES - Review 2013-2014.xls](#)