

CAMBRIDGESHIRE LOCAL ASSISTANCE SCHEME (CLAS)

To: Adults Committee

Meeting Date: 7 July 2015

From: Adrian Loades, Executive Director: Children, Families and Adults Services

Electoral division(s): All

Forward Plan ref: **Key decision:** No

Purpose: To update the Committee on the development of the Cambridgeshire Local Assistance Scheme (CLAS).

Recommendation: The Committee is asked to:

- a) note the agreement by the General Purposes Committee for the additional funding of £163k to be made available for use on direct provision as it is expected that the original allocation of £350k will not be sufficient to meet expected demands
- b) agree to Officers approaching the district/city councils about future administration of the scheme
- c) agree the proposals put forward for investment so that detailed work can begin to put these schemes into action
- d) delegate the approval of further investment to the Executive Director, Children, Families and Adults, in consultation with the Chairwoman and Vice Chairwoman of the Committee.

Officer contact:	
Name:	Mary Whitehand
Post:	CFA Information Team Manager
Email:	Mary.whitehand@cambridgeshire.gov.uk
Tel:	

1.0 BACKGROUND

The Cambridgeshire Local Assistance Scheme (CLAS) is now in its third year of operation and provides assistance for immediate crisis support and helping people settle back into the community following a crisis. The scheme is targeted at vulnerable groups and operates to a clear eligibility criteria. A total of 1,306 successful applications were made to CLAS in 2014-15.

At the Adults Committee meeting of March 26 it was resolved:

- To agree to the overall development of CLAS
- To agree the continuation of direct provision for crisis support and resettlement and to explore options for other local organisations to administer the scheme.
- To agree that investment is made available to build greater sustainability into crisis support on the understanding that funding for local welfare provision is to remain uncertain for the foreseeable future
- To seek agreement from the General Purposes Committee to increase the allocation of £350k to a maximum of £513k (as set out in the recent Government announcement confirming the allocations to Local Authorities for local welfare assistance) with the additional £163k being used to support direct provision;
- To agree to the development of a full business case for the use of recycled white goods as part of the CLAS scheme.

Work has continued to deliver on the developments as outlined above.

2.0 DEVELOPMENT

2.1 Funding allocation

2.1.1 The General Purposes Committee (GPC) discussed CLAS funding allocations at their meeting on 19 May at which it was resolved to increase the current CLAS allocation of £350k to the maximum of £513k. This was the amount set out in the Government's February announcement confirming the allocations to Local Authorities for local welfare and health and social care needs. The GPC noted that:

- (a) The current allocation of £350k was likely to be insufficient to meet the demand for direct provision despite the agreement to reduce the amount per successful application from £535 to £350
- (b) The £513k funding would be recurrent, but a decision about the future funding of CLAS would be reviewed in the light of some of the plans to make CLAS more self-sustaining during 2015-16.

The majority of the CLAS funding (£338k) is now allocated to direct provision, with a reduced amount for administration and £100k allocated to investment activity which is aimed at developing sustainability for the future.

The amount available for each application under the direct provision has been reduced to a value of £350 from the original £1000. So far, in April and May of this year, 130 applications have been awarded, to the value of £33,321 and the majority of this is being used for white goods, furniture and

beds.

2.2 Administration arrangements

- 2.2.1 The Council currently administers the scheme across Cambridgeshire by contracting with Charis Grants. Administration covers a number of elements including: registering authorised agents to help individuals apply, reviewing applications against criteria for assistance, signposting to other forms of assistance, processing successful applications, access to suppliers of fuel, clothing vouchers, white goods, training and dealing with appeals.

The option of delivery of CLAS through each district/city council was raised when the scheme first transferred from the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) in 2013. At that point there was no interest from the district/city councils to administer the scheme in their areas.

However, it is appropriate to raise the possibility of local administration again with each council through the CLAS Task and Finish Group and through the Cambridgeshire Public Service Board (CPSB) who have received regular reports from CLAS.).

2.3 Investment in schemes

- 2.3.1 Following the earlier Committee decision, work has taken place across the county, with colleagues from district/city councils, voluntary sector and other partner agencies, to understand opportunities to invest in schemes that would have sustainable outcomes as well as those that would have a role in helping prevent people fall into crisis.

Through the work of the CLAS Task and Finish Group, membership of which includes the city and district councils, representatives from two housing associations, Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Clinical Commissioning Group, Department for Work and Pensions, Citizens Advice Bureaux and Charis Grants, five areas of activity are being proposed for investment at this stage. Some are more developed than others and all are being recommended for approval subject to further work being undertaken in response to this paper. The five areas are::

- a. The use of recycled white goods to replace new white goods – undertaking an initial 6 month pilot in Cambridge City and, following and subject to evaluation, roll out across the county;
- b. Comprehensive advice and information service for professionals, people working with those in crisis and people who themselves are in crisis – investment to expand an existing Rural CAB led project (Right Advice and Right Time);
- c. Sustaining and building the capacity of the food banks (managed by Trussell Trust) and assistance with distribution of food in rural areas around St Neots;
- d. Networking and ‘conferencing’ to increase integration and intelligence about sources of help as well as to develop other ways of building capacity within the crisis support ‘system’
- e. Building and maintaining the resilience of H-CAP (formerly Poverty Partnership) and developing this as model for others to adopt.

Details of the proposed schemes are set out below.

2.4 Use of Recycled White Goods

- 2.4.1 The scheme involves investing £31,600 (in two phases) to start to replace the current use of new white goods with recycled white goods. The proposal is to initially run a pilot in the Cambridge City area for 6 months and expand this across the county if, as anticipated, it proves successful. The pilot will be delivered in partnership between Cambridge City Council, the Wiser Group, Cambridge Re-Use, Charis and the County Council. Initial discussions have been held/ made- held doesn't make sense? With the City Council and there are no contractual issues affecting existing waste contracts.
- 2.4.2 The model operates by making carefully managed household collections of white goods donated by members of the public. These white good are either re-conditioned and made available to CLAS applicants (and potentially other people on low incomes) or broken down and sold for scrap. If the scheme is successful the current price for supplying white goods will drop from £200-£250 to £60-90 per unit. (Price variability would apply depending on the make, model and condition).
- 2.4.3 The scheme will not provide cookers as the supply of second hand standalone cookers will not be sufficient to meet current demand. If this proves otherwise, the arrangements can then be reviewed. In the meantime, these will continue to be supplied by Charis under the arrangements of the current contract.
- 2.4.4 Under the current arrangements white goods are purchased, transported, fitted and, in the event of breakdown, replaced. Cambridge Re-Use are proposing, as part of the pilot, to replicate these arrangements in the following ways by employing an additional member of staff to undertake the following:
- Function testing of appliances;
 - Fitting at clients' premises;
 - Deliveries to CLAS clients; and
 - Collect reconditioned white goods for from Wiser

2.5 Advice and Information

- 2.5.1 The proposal is to invest £13,500 in the significant expansion of an existing project that has been running in the past two years funded in part by the Lottery and partners organisations.
- 2.5.2 The scheme has been formally evaluated by EG: Consulting and considered successful. It represents a new service delivery model for the established advice sector in Huntingdonshire to improve access and service outcomes to clients (up to 10,000), based on the adoption of a contact centre and innovative telephone 'Gateway' solution. Each client, when they contact the contact centre, receives a personalised telephone 'Gateway' assessment by volunteers addressing their benefit, debt, discrimination, employment or housing advice issue/s, leading to the identification, if appropriate, of further access to a specialist adviser (on a face-to-face and outreach basis).
- 2.5.3 By establishing a single point of access into all advice services locally, the advice sector has developed improved ways of working together including

sharing resources, expertise and specialisms, volunteers (their recruitment and training), premises and information communications technologies.

- 2.5.4 Investment in this scheme alongside existing funding would allow it to expand across the county offering a single point of contact to professionals, as well as residents, to access advice on a range of issues including crisis assistance and support. The second phase would also include a web enabled query system being introduced. It is anticipated that Phase 2 would see at least 20 more volunteers trained increasing the total number advisers to a total base of 50 volunteers enabling an increase from the current 5,500 call enquiries per annum to anticipated 10,000 call enquiries per annum.
- 2.5.5 The organisations currently involved plan to bid to secure funding from the Lottery to develop a four year project where the longer term aim is to try to bring the advice sector together in a more integrated way. The project will work in conjunction with the proposals from the County Council to build a quality assured information and advice helpline that can be accessed by carers, front line workers and people in need of support. It will save the County Council money by using a trained and skilled workforce, made up predominately of volunteers, supporting its own community while ensuring quality standards are maintained. The project also offers the possibility of developing a shared client database for those seeking assistance which has the potential to become a powerful information source for understanding and tracking people seeking assistance and the reasons for this.
- 2.5.6 Two specific outputs for CLAS would be the development and maintenance of a 'directory' capturing sources of help for people in crisis and specific training for the volunteers about the crisis support available, as well as ensuring people calling in crisis are supported in a holistic way e.g. if they are asking for assistance with food, other needs might be assessed to see if other action or support might be taken to prevent the crisis worsening. Investing in this scheme will also bring significant benefits to the County Council and partners in other ways.
- 2.5.7 In broader terms, the investment would offer CLAS and those supporting people in crisis the following:
- A quick and easy telephone and webchat access to offer financial and debt advice, empowering people by giving advice on how to deal with emergency situations i.e. bailiffs, court action as well as helping them to tackle underlying debt issues by supporting financial planning and arranging face to face specialist appointments where necessary;
 - Increased capacity (30 to 50 volunteers trained to deal with people in crisis) to give information and advice on issues related to benefits, debt, employment, housing and other legal matters;
 - A robust early intervention option to empowering people in crisis with the right information and options for dealing with their problems to help avoid/prevent homelessness, unemployment and stress/health related issues caused through debt; and
 - A Contact Centre to act as an access point to a multi-agency approach for those people in crisis with complex needs.

2.6 Food banks

- 2.6.1 The provision of food through food banks is a key part of the crisis support

system across Cambridgeshire. Their independence makes them effective in attracting charitable donations not only of food itself but also some sponsorship from local companies. Recent discussions have suggested ways in which the County Council can help build and sustain the capacity of the food banks and ensure that clients seeking assistance through food banks can be better supported by access to CLAS, and other parts of the 'system' that might offer assistance to those in crisis. The figure required for investment is yet to be determined.

2.6.2 Suggested actions to assist food banks include:

- For CLAS authorised agents to be invited to be referral agencies and voucher holders for Cambridgeshire food banks;
- For Cambridgeshire food bank volunteers to be trained to be able to refer clients to CLAS;
- Building the capacity of food banks through training such as safeguarding, volunteers and the law, health and safety etc;
- Providing information sheet for food banks of organisations available in Cambridgeshire for further signposting of clients;
- Ensure food banks are communicated to about changes to CLAS;
- Ensure where food banks and CLAS offer similar services e.g. food and fuel there is no duplication.

2.7 Networking and Area Events Linked to Build Community Capacity

2.7.1 A consistent theme throughout the development of CLAS for 2015-16, has been the value authorised agents and partners involved in supporting those in crisis attach to formal and informal networking opportunities. This value comes about by authorised agents, in particular, understanding what sources of assistance exist at a local level to support those in crisis and to develop between them ways of working better to support those in crisis.

2.7.2 The proposal is to hold 5 district based 'whole system' events over the next six months, bringing all interested parties together to share knowledge, ideas and developing further ideas for making crisis support more self-sustaining and integrated. Ideally, these events would be hosted by the district councils and facilitated by the county council. The outcome would be to understand what further actions might be taken to make to continue to develop crisis support across the county with a focus on local ownership and solutions, as well as prevention. This proposal, which would require minimal funding and some county council officer time.

2.8 Sustaining and Developing Capacity of H-Cap and a Possible Future Model to Be Replicated Elsewhere

2.8.1 H-CAP (formerly Poverty Partnership) is a group of agencies and charities that work together to help families on Huntingdon North Ward deal with the effects of poverty. Operating under the umbrella of 'Love Oxmoor' this is a community outreach initiative from Medway Church on the Oxmoor Estate. It aims to meet people at their point of crisis and to help them move on by liaising with various partner organisations. Specific projects include:

- Community Shop "Love Oxmoor" partners with a local volunteer to run a community shop 4 days a week for nearly new clothes, baby items, household goods and much more. As well as affordable clothes and

household items the shop also gives the opportunity for mums to start volunteering and giving back to their community, as a consequence friendship groups are enlarged and confidence is grown. At present three volunteers support the work of the shop. The Community Shop also runs a tea room which is open during our Friday session which is a time to browse the shop have a drink and time to chat. These sessions also attended by Children's Centre Workers who interact with children and chat with parents.

- Food Bank which not only administers food for those who need it, but also links them up with partner organisations that can help them move on. For example anyone applying for a food voucher for a family with under 5's is asked to collect their food parcel from the Children's Centre where the workers can have an informal chat with them to see if they can help and if the client is accessing their services.
- Debt Advice - Huntingdon Area Money Advice which is run by local churches and member of Advice UK, authorised and registered with Financial Conduct Authority, helps people manage their debt problems and work their way out of debt. Each session includes an advisor and a 'befriender' and the 'befriender' will help keep in contact with the person between sessions and meet up for coffee and chat where appropriate.

2.8.2 All of the areas covered by "Love Oxmoor" work together as people who need one of the services will more often than not need to access others. In short, it is a model of integration based on voluntary, community and charitable contributions which CLAS is seeking to encourage and develop more of.

2.8.3 The proposal is to invest £5,800 in this 'initiative' to develop some of its existing activities further but also to sustain some existing activities: Specifically, to:

- Introduce safety equipment to the community shop as Oxmoor has the highest rate of under 5's visits to A & E in the county;
- Be able to supply white goods and furniture to those families being rehoused from temporary accommodation (need for storage);
- Linking with Little Bundles a charity based in Cambridge so that professional can support their vulnerable families with appropriate baby clothes and equipment (storage); and
- Develop our volunteer/training programme;
- To meet current storage and rental costs, in order to sustain current levels of work.

2.8.4 The model developed in Huntingdonshire has been established for some time and has already been supported by the County Council through its community development service. It serves as a potential model to be developed elsewhere. Consideration will be given as part of funding this project to exploring further its impact and potential to be applied elsewhere. The "Love Oxmoor" team have suggested that they would be interested in developing a 'learning' resource that could be used to help others start similar projects at a cost of £2,500. This would also contribute to the development of their existing volunteers as it would see them playing a key part in delivering this work to the benefit of other communities.

2.8.5 The proposed investment of £54,400 in the activities set out above could enable significant changes to crisis support systems and build capacity in the

community. Partner organisations would be able to develop the proposals further with a target start date of September 2015, if investment is agreed. Other opportunities for further investment are still being encouraged from organisations involved in responding to people at a time of crisis across Cambridgeshire.

3.0 ALIGNMENT WITH CORPORATE PRIORITIES

3.1 Developing the local economy for the benefit of all

- 3.1.1 The following bullet point sets out details of implications identified by officers:
- Securing and retaining employment can be greatly assisted by people being in settled accommodation and this is an area that CLAS has been able to contribute to with some success.

3.2 Helping people live healthy and independent lives

- 3.2.1 The following bullet point sets out details of implications identified by officers:
- CLAS has an important contribution to make to helping people in moments of crisis either remain healthy and independent or regain their health and independence with the injection of short-term crisis support that CLAS can give. Of all the people who have been assisted so far a significant number have been able to return to more settled lives and, as a result, have regained their independence.

3.3 Supporting and protecting vulnerable people

- 3.3.1 The following bullet point sets out details of implications identified by officers:
- CLAS is a scheme targeted at the most vulnerable and by definition those seeking assistance from the scheme have found themselves in in potentially harmful situations e.g. fleeing domestic violence; without shelter, food or heating.

4.0 SIGNIFICANT IMPLICATIONS

4.1 Resource Implications

- 4.1.1 The following bullet points set out details of implications identified by officers:
- £513k has been allocated to the CLAS scheme for 2015-16;
 - At this stage £413k has been allocated to fund direct provision, including £75k for the administration costs, with the remaining £100k being used for investment into schemes to reduce costs and build greater sustainability and integration into crisis support work.

Officers will continue to explore ways of reducing costs within the scheme overall, particularly with regard to the provision of white goods, alternative administration options and through investment in scheme activity.

4.2 Statutory, Risk and Legal Implications

- 4.2.1 The following bullet points set out details of implications identified by officers:
- Statutory: The provision of a local welfare assistance scheme is not a statutory obligation so the council is under no legal duty to provide this service.
 - Increased Risk to People in Crisis: It is hard to quantify whether those

that have been supported by CLAS so far would have been more at risk if the scheme hadn't provided them with the assistance it did, in the way it did. Certainly, the scheme has been beneficial in helping many people recover from crisis situations.

4.3 Equality and Diversity Implications

- 4.3.1 The following bullet point sets out details of implications identified by officers:
- A community impact assessment (CIA) was produced when the scheme was designed and careful consideration was given to ensuring certain groups were not denied access to the scheme by the way the eligibility criteria was set out. The CIA was revisited in the light of the decision to control expenditure in September 2014. A further update of the CIA has now been completed. CLAS provides important assistance for woman and disabled people (including mental health). If the scheme were not to continue these groups would be affected.

4.4 Engagement and Consultation Implications

- 4.4.1 The following bullet point sets out details of implications identified by officers:
- In developing the original scheme there was both formal and informal engagement with key stakeholders groups and this has continued largely through the Financial Capability Forum. A task and finish group made up of key stakeholders (including city and district councils, two housing associations, CCG, DWP, CAB and Charis) has been actively involved in the development of CLAS and have provided invaluable insight and expertise into how CLAS might evolve. There remains a strong commitment amongst partners to ensure some of local welfare provision is secured for the longer term. Four consultation events were held in November 2014 and March 2015, largely attended by authorised agents. A short informal consultation about the changes for 2015-16 took place between 11 and 23 March 2015.

4.5 Public Health Implications

- 4.5.1 The following bullet point sets out details of implications identified by officers:
- As CLAS provides emergency food and heating it can have a direct impact on people's health. Sometimes these people already suffer and/or are recovering from a period of ill health.

4.6 Localism and Local Member Involvement

- 4.6.1 The following bullet point sets out details of implications identified by officers:
- The development of future options for the scheme has the scope to involve local communities more e.g. the provision of food to food banks, charitable collections of clothes and furniture, and recycling of white goods. These will be considered alongside the options for the scheme moving forward.

SOURCE DOCUMENTS

Source Documents	Location
CLAS Eligibility Criteria	Room 224, Shire Hall, Cambridge http://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/info/20075/parenting_and_family_support/379/cambridgeshire_local_assistance_scheme_clas