

CAMBRIDGESHIRE LOCAL ASSISTANCE SCHEME (CLAS) – FUTURE OPTIONS

To: **Adults Committee**

Meeting Date: **4th December 2014**

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

Electoral division(s): **All**

Forward Plan ref: **Key decision:** Yes

Purpose: To seek the Committee's views on a preferred option for developing CLAS dependent on what level of funding will be available to support the scheme.

Recommendation: The Committee is asked to:

- a) Agree the preferred option for development of CLAS pending a final decision with regard to the amount of funding available;
- b) Agree that officers develop a final option for agreement by the Committee in February 2015 once the funding situation becomes settled; and
- c) Support further discussions on the possibility of funding CLAS through financial contributions from individual partner organisations.

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1.0 PURPOSE

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to present a range of options on the future development of the Cambridgeshire Local Assistance Scheme (CLAS) based on an understanding of current use and need for the scheme and subject to final decisions being made about the amount of funding available.

2.0 SCOPE

- 2.1 This paper does not consider directly issues related to any future operating model or who is best placed to deliver any of the options being explored below. This will be determined once a decision is made on the preferred model. A number of options exist including extending the contract with the current provider; establishing a social enterprise or pass-porting funding through to the city/district councils.
- 2.2 The decision surrounding the final option will also be determined by the availability and level of funding. The level of funding may also determine the scope and ambition of the scheme. There are currently a range of possible funding options:
- Funding from central government;
 - Funding from partners, including the county council;
 - Funding from donors; and
 - A mixture of the above.
- 2.3 A further scenario is there is no funding or stakeholders judge that, in the current financial climate, resourcing local welfare assistance is not the best use of resources. In these circumstances, the focus would therefore be on an exit strategy for the current scheme.
- 2.4 Informal discussions have now started with a range of partners, including city/district councils, Care Commissioning Group (CCG), Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB), Cambridgeshire Community Foundation and housing associations, asking them to consider the possibility of contributing towards the funding of CLAS if no Government money is available for 2015-16.

3.0 Background and Context

- 3.1 CLAS was introduced in April 2013 to replace the discretionary elements of the Department of Work & Pensions (DWP) social fund (community care grants and crisis loans) which were abolished as part of the Welfare Reform Act. Each local authority area was allocated funds to underwrite the costs of local schemes but only for two years. CLAS provides crisis support for vulnerable people or families under exceptional pressure, a significant component of which is crisis support for those suddenly finding themselves having to set up a new home. This includes those fleeing domestic violence, those leaving institutional settings (care homes, prisons, the armed services etc.) and others requiring immediate help to get re-established in the community. It also provides help to enable vulnerable people and families to sustain their tenancy and avoid going into care.
- 3.2 Initially, the scheme had very strict eligibility criteria to manage demand on a fixed and greatly reduced budget from DWP. The eligibility criteria were relaxed slightly in

June (following a decision by Cabinet in April) to allow a wider range of support to families in difficulties, including access to emergency fuel payments.

- 3.3 The scheme is run for the County Council by Charis Grants, appointed after a competitive procurement process. Charis Grants run a number of other trust and fund schemes and seeks out additional support for the applicant if they are eligible from these schemes and signposts the applicant to other schemes where appropriate.
- 3.4 Applicants cannot apply directly to the scheme but through their case officer or authorised agent who can confirm the circumstances of the applicant.
- 3.5 Future funding for the scheme is uncertain. The Government is currently consulting on the future provision of local welfare assistance and has committed to make a decision before the end of December 2014.

4.0 DATA RELATED TO THE CURRENT SCHEME

- 4.1 A detailed analysis of the current scheme has been undertaken. The key headlines are as follows:
- 1391 claims to the value of £752,457 have been paid since the start of the scheme;
 - The average claim was £541, the largest £1576 and the smallest £0;
 - 103 people have had more than one claim accepted;
 - The average age of people with claims approved was 36, the oldest person was 88;
 - 693 (50%) claims were paid to people with one or more children totalling a spend of £412,499 (55%);
 - 68% of accepted claims were paid to females but 70% of the total spend;
 - 37% of accepted claims were for Families under exceptional pressure, 39% of the total spend;
 - 87% of spend was on the 76% of claims that included White Goods;
 - 35% of accepted claims were made in Cambridge City, 25% in Fenland; and
 - 71% of spend is in areas classified as “urban town and city.”

5.0 WHAT ARE DRIVERS FOR ASSISTANCE FROM CLAS?

- 5.1 Demand for CLAS has steadily risen since its inception in April 2013 and, in part, is driven by the engagement with authorised agents. There was a slow start whilst agents familiarised themselves with the scheme and were trained in a new application process. This resulted in a significant under spend in the first year of the scheme.
- 5.2 There are now approximately 400 authorised agents covering most parts of the county and most service areas. Authorised agents are approved by the county council. 40% of the claims paid (39% of spend) were referrals from housing providers, 38% of claims paid (41% of spend) were from statutory organisations. It should be noted some agents did not join the scheme until April 2014 e.g. Cambridge CAB.

5.3 Spend based on geographical areas is as follows:

District	% of households (Cambridgeshire)	% of approved claims	% of total spend
Cambridge	18.6%	34.5%	33.7%
E Cambs	13.8%	6.8%	7.4%
Fenland	16.2%	25.1%	25.1%
Hunts	27.6%	13.6%	13.7%
S Cambs	23.9%	19.3%	19.2%

This suggests that applications in some geographical areas are disproportionately high given the numbers of households and the levels of deprivation in those areas.

5.4 It is assumed that demand for CLAS is driven by the following factors:

- The negative impact of the Government's welfare reforms especially in the reduction in benefits and the way benefits are now processed;
- The more stringent benefit application processes and delay in benefit medical examinations resulting in people having little or no resource to meet living needs for several weeks;
- The rise in the number of people moving into unfurnished accommodation;
- Homelessness;
- Domestic violence cases;
- Rising needs for food support in rural areas that are not well served by food banks;
- Austerity measures and the economy placing more families under increased pressure especially because of the higher inflationary pressures of energy and food prices on poorer households; and
- The impact of reductions in services levels in areas such as mental health, OP services, disabilities services and housing services.

5.5 Analysis of demand data suggests the following:

- Housing benefit claimants show a recent decreasing trend except in Fenland;
- Homelessness numbers are volatile but show recent increase in Cambridge, East Cambridgeshire and Huntingdonshire;
- There were significant increases in DHP applications between 2012/13 and 2013/14;
- In the last quarter of 2013/14 the number of CAB clients with issues around benefits, debt and housing problems increased, with debt being the primary presenting problem.
- Reported incidents of domestic violence have remained static over the last 2 years;

- Since 2009 wages have lagged behind inflation and have only overtaken inflation again this autumn. This means that most households have experienced a five year period where the cost of living has gone up but wages haven't. This has placed many thousands into 'in work' poverty;
- As part of their Minimum Income Standard work (MIS) The Joseph Rowntree Trust have reported that the cost of a minimum basket of household goods and services have increased by 27% whereas wages and benefit levels have not risen by this amount at all. This contrast is at its starkest for couples with two children. They would need to earn 46% more than they did in 2008 to reach the MIS threshold whilst wages have risen by just 9% over that period. The three biggest elements of the increase are the cost of food up by 26%, domestic energy by 45% and bus travel by 37%; and
- The Trussell Trust (the UK's biggest network of food banks) reports that the number of 3 day parcels of emergency food that it supplies have increased from 61,468 in 2010/11 to 913,138 in 2013/14. In the Eastern Region the growth has been from 12,126 people supplied with emergency food aid in 2011/12 to 91,420 in 2013/14. Local Foodbanks report continued high levels of activity. Between the three month period April – June (inclusive) Ely food bank fulfilled 1073 separate requests (vouchers) for support. Huntingdon Foodbank, over a similar time period fulfilled requests for 486 people.

5.6 An examination of the immediate triggers leading to people needing assistance from CLAS has shown the following:

- A single issue trigger: e.g. benefit application process causing delays in payment; significant debt; the need for winter clothing; homelessness caused by domestic violence, family breakdown or eviction
- The trigger is not the initial crisis but getting a permanent tenancy once the initial crisis is dealt with by another agency. These requests are mainly for white goods and furniture. The initial crisis are predominantly due to domestic violence or mental health issues; and
- Multiple issue trigger: i.e. the accumulative effect and then something happens that becomes the 'last straw', triggering an application to CLAS. Domestic violence, mental health breakdown and falling into extreme poverty.

6.0 EVALUATION AND IMPACT

- 6.1 A number of case studies have been developed to show how individuals have benefited from assistance from CLAS – see appendix. Due to the speed in which the scheme had to be developed and the unfamiliarity with the previous schemes run by the DWP, specific outcomes measures were not developed as part of the original scheme. Effort was focused on establishing the right eligibility criteria, designing and procuring the right type of service and estimating what the impact of running the scheme would be with reduced funding and uncertainty about numbers of applications.
- 6.2 In operating any future scheme, to assess its impact consideration would need to be given to tracking people from receipt of application, receiving assistance and their 'recovery' period. Re-avoidance rates would be a key measure, but the factors that influence people's success in re-establishing their lives can be multiple and indirectly influenced by a number of factors. Authorised agents are of the clear view that the

combination of practical assistance received from CLAS and professional help is an effective combination in assisting people out of crisis.

7.0 REFLECTIONS ON THE CURRENT SCHEME

7.1 A 12 month review of the current scheme was undertaken in June and the key observations then are still applicable. The review concluded:

1. CLAS is meeting its stated aims and is proving an effective tool to help those in crisis to re-settle back into the community and to sustain their tenancies;
2. The scheme is valued by authorised agents;
3. The range and geographical spread of agents and applications is wide but not consistent;
4. The operation of CLAS until June 2014 has been well received;
5. Take up was initially slow but has steadily risen;
6. Most schemes offer assistance for (via vouchers) for food, clothing, heating, bedding and some white goods;
7. Very few schemes offer cash;
8. Nationally, a significant number of local welfare schemes under spent, including Cambridgeshire where money was used to protect services supporting vulnerable groups;
9. There are different operating models for running local assistance schemes;
10. CLAS (and other assistance schemes) are not joined up;
11. There is scope for targeting CLAS more on basic requirements e.g. food, heating, clothing needs), and those in an immediate crisis as well as those who require essential key household items;
12. There is scope for reducing administrative costs, dependent of the aim of the scheme; and
13. Charis have been an effective provider in terms of ideas for developing the scheme, finding efficiencies and providing 'additional' services (e.g. 24 responses to clients in need of immediate assistance) which was not part of the original service specification.

7.2 Engagement with stakeholders in recent weeks suggests the following:

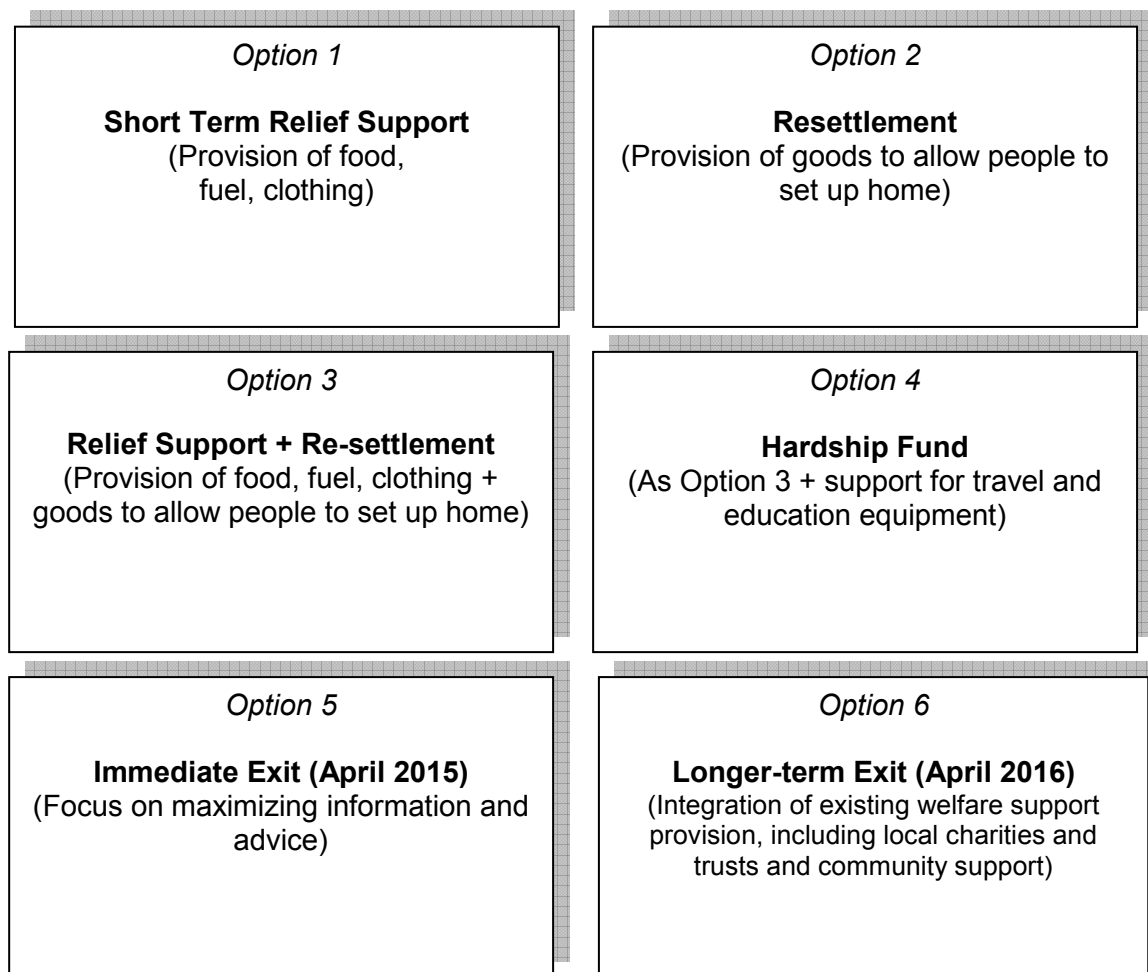
- Both the crisis, resettlement and tenancy sustainment elements of the scheme are highly valued;
- Stakeholders believe there is a continuing need for a local welfare assistance scheme but recognise the challenges this might bring in the current financial climate;
- The current provider is valued;
- The demand for the scheme will grow and /or does not target 'hidden' need e.g. private sector housing tenants, homeless communities;
- Commitment to the scheme is strong; and
- Stakeholders have a clear view (and growing consensus) about the developments they would like to see moving forward including making better use of existing resources to support people in crisis and developing a more comprehensive system of support across the county

8.0 KEY DESIGN FEATURES – IMPACT MEASURES

- 8.1 Discussions with key stakeholders to date have led to a broadly consensus view that any future scheme should seek to have the following features. If agreed, these would be used as a set of 'design features' to help evaluate the desirability and likely impact of any future scheme.
- 8.2 The scheme needs to:
1. Target those most in need based on understanding current triggers and demands, distinguishingly more clearly between 'needs' and 'wants'. Broadly speaking the eligibility criteria is seen to be right but at the moment both the type and volume of applications are driven by the number and location of authorised agents. The scheme therefore needs to be more explicit about what level of awards are available by client type/group and targeted more at the most vulnerable.
 2. Be 'incentivised' to encourage people to asset build and develop skills to enable them to sustain their journey to independence.
 3. Consider circumstances and arrangements whereby some clients should be asked to payback awards or contribute to the total cost of awards when clients become more settled and can afford an element of payback. There would, however, be challenges in adopting this approach with some client groups.
 4. Be part of, support or facilitate the greater integration of existing welfare provision in Cambridgeshire including developing and supporting the use of existing sources of help.
 5. Remain responsive and adaptable to changing agent and client needs.
 6. Be more cost efficient in terms of processing applications.
 7. Ensure provision of goods is efficient and cost effective as possible and this might include finding a better way to source some goods (e.g. white goods) and giving greater consideration to the use of second hand goods.
 8. Be underpinned by the better provision of information related to the range of support available to those in need. (This feature should be pursued regardless of what option is chosen and will be particularly important if no future scheme emerges).
- 8.3 It should be noted that these design features can be developed into a set of impact measures but might differ depending on the final option chosen and preferred operating model. The impact measures can be brought into sharper focus along with output measures as a preferred option is developed.

9.0 OPTIONS

- 9.1 Looking across a range of local authority schemes, and discussing ideas with stakeholders, several future options have emerged which are summarised below:



9.2 Option 1: Short Term Relief Support

This would be a more targeted version of the current scheme where assistance was provided on the basis of giving short term relief concentrating on elevating the most adverse conditions. The scheme could be developed to give more emphasis on homelessness. Provision of food would complement provision from food banks e.g. specialist food for babies and areas where food banks do not operate or people are unable to access a food bank due to lack of transport. The numbers assisted could be increased and would be more targeted. Such an option could be delivered in a number of ways i.e. providing direct support to food banks particularly in terms of capacity support and passing money direct to housing authorities. Administration would need to be quick and efficient, and not necessarily handled by one provider. It is suggested total awards would be smaller e.g. £50-£100.

To successfully fund such a scheme, based on current numbers, the approximate cost would be £300-500k.

9.3 Option 2: Resettlement

In this option, immediate assistance would be expected to be managed by authorised agents (as is the case in some instances now) and the fund would focus on providing assistance to help clients continue their journey of 'recovery' based on

their need. Such a scheme would be able to put a greater focus on 'asset building' and sustainability thus reducing the chances of clients falling back into crisis. There would be a strong emphasis on white goods, furniture and bedding so effort would need to be focused on a provider(s) able to supply the goods required. It is suggested total awards per application would be limited to between £300-£400 and a lower specification of goods would be offered to maximize reach. An element of payback could be introduced for some clients.

To successfully fund such a scheme, based on current numbers, the approximate cost would be £400-600k.

9.4 Option 3: Relief Support + Re-settlement

This is the current model. Suggested changes would be awards limited to between £300-£500 and a lower specification of goods would be offered to maximize reach. 'Asset building' could become a feature as might an element of payback. Administration would need to be quick and the provision of services and goods robust. There would be administrative burdens for pay back depending how the scheme was financially structured and not everyone would be able to 'payback.'

To successfully fund such a scheme, based on current numbers, the approximate cost would be £600-800k.

9.5 Option 4: Hardship Fund

In this option people could apply direct to a hardship fund for assistance. This is more likely to focus on re-settlement, education assistance (schools and further education) and travel e.g. visiting sick family members in hospital. The scheme would not offer immediate assistance. This option would allow a stronger emphasis on providing more holistic support around clients e.g. advice, information and financial support, debt advice etc. this option may be more attractive to donors. There is a clear link to other hardship funds that exist in the county and this option would need to be explored further in that context. This option may not require the provision of goods. Likely to be slower in terms of administration and would still require the input of authorised agents.

To successfully fund such a scheme, based on current numbers, the approximate cost would be £400-500k.

9.6 Option 5: Immediate Exit (April 2015)

This assumes no funding or a decision by stakeholders not to fund local welfare provision beyond the end of March 2015. This option is being explored with stakeholders now until the funding situation resolves itself.

The assumption is that there would need to be a greater emphasis on information and advice to assist people in need of crisis support. Information is currently held by different organisations and is not always easily available to those in crisis and those supporting people in crisis. It also needs to be kept up to date.

In the medium term, greater liaison between groups that assist people in crisis would need to be strengthened including the involvement of charities, the statutory sector and communities. This is explored further in Option 6. However, it should be noted that some charities are not always in a position to help those with immediate practical support nor can not provide the assistance required to short timescales.

9.7 Option 6

In this option, there would be focus of consolidation; sustainability; and building the current 'informal' resources and networks of support that currently exist across Cambridgeshire to support people suffering hardship. The key features of this approach would be the better co-ordination of, and navigation around, the existing 'system' to allow people to more easily access the opportunities available to them and to help organisations to be more co-ordinated in their work to support vulnerable clients. This would be achieved by:

- Better availability of information and advice;
- Addressing the shortfall in specific types of provision e.g. food in rural areas;
- Consolidation and co-ordination of key organisations to allow good supply of key items e.g. white goods;
- Exploring the possibility of joining up welfare funds that already exist;
- Investing in infrastructure e.g. IT, transport and training.

Arguably this option should be pursued alongside the other options on the basis that funding for local welfare pressure will continue to remain uncertain. If funding is secured for 2015-6 some resource might be earmarked to develop this option. This option would take longer to implement but the emphasis would be on sustainability.

It is harder to fully cost this option but resources could be used to fund the following:

- A full time worker to facilitate the development of the 'network of provision;' providing information and advice; and working to build alternative sources of funding (£40k);
- Funding to assist local charities to co-ordinate their efforts better e.g. transport for collecting and distributing white goods (£75k-100k); and
- Funding specific gaps in provision, most likely to be fuel payments or food in certain areas (£100K)

- 9.8 At this stage officers are inclined to focus on Options 5 and 6 until the funding situation becomes clearer. As mentioned above, it would be prudent to develop these options anyway even if the Government funds welfare provision to a reasonable level in 2015-16. To this end discussions have begun with a range of services and agencies that may contribute to developing a more integrated welfare service for people in need. These include local charities, advisory services (e.g. CAB, Money Advice), local welfare schemes and statutory services (e.g. council services and DWP). These discussions will continue over the coming weeks.

10.0 **ALIGNMENT WITH CORPORATE PRIORITIES**

10.1 **Developing the local economy for the benefit of all**

- 10.1.1 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.

10.2 Helping people live healthy and independent lives

- 10.2.1 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 result have regained their independence.

10.3 Supporting and protecting vulnerable people

- 10.3.1 CLAS is a scheme targeted at the most vulnerable and by definition those seeking assistance from the scheme have found themselves in a vulnerable situations e.g. fleeing domestic violence, without shelter, food or heating.

11.0 SIGNIFICANT IMPLICATIONS

11.1 Resource Implications

- 11.1.1 The resource implications surrounding CLAS are set out within the body of this paper. To summarise:
- The funding situation from central government will not be known until late in December;
 - The cost of running the scheme as it currently operates is approximately £800k which is a further reduction on spend compared to that provided by the DWP two years ago;
 - Each of the options sets out above indicates approximately what it would cost to run them;
 - Broadly speaking, the less resource available (from whatever source) to fund CLAS the greater the need to reduce the scope of the scheme and target it more;
 - In the absence of no or reduced funding the emphasis is likely to be on Options 5 and 6; and
 - Even if a reasonable level of funding was secured, an emphasis on building a more sustainable scheme (and therefore helping to reduce costs) would be pursued.

11.2 Statutory, Risk and Legal Implications

- 11.2.1 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.
- 11.2.2 Risk: The risk associated with local welfare assistance are considered high from two perspectives – reputational and by not having a crisis assistance scheme are vulnerable people more at risk when they find themselves in a moment of crisis?

Reputational

Over the years certain organisations have come to rely on the social fund/CLAS as an

invaluable source of help to assist people re-settling back into the community. There is a growing realisation that this assistance may not be available from April next year and the Council's reduction in spend is already having a negative impact in this area and is causing some organisations to raise concerns directly with members and senior officers.

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 to helping many people recover from their crisis situations.

11.3 Equality and Diversity Implications

- 11.3.1 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 recent decision to control expenditure (September 2014). CLAS provides important assistance for woman and disabled people (including mental health). If the scheme were not to continue these groups would be affected.

11.4 Engagement and Consultation Implications

- 11.4.1 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 of key stakeholders (including city and district councils, two housing associations, CCG, DWP, CAB and Charis) has been actively involved in the development of this report and have provided invaluable insight and expertise to how CLAS might evolve. There remains a strong commitment amongst partners to ensure some of local welfare provision is secured from April 2015.
- 11.4.2 Two consultation events were held in November, largely attended by authorised agents. Their views are reflected in this paper. Formal consultation about the future of the scheme from April 2015 will be undertaken at the appropriate time, probably early in the New Year. This would also include an updated CIA.

11.5 Public Health Implications

- 11.5.1 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.

11.6 Localism and Local Member Involvement

- 11.6.1 The development of future options for the scheme has the scope of involving 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	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

**Examples of families helped in the first year of CLAS
(Cambridgeshire Local Assistance Scheme)**

These case studies were provided by front line professional workers acting as authorised agents for families who were helped by CLAS during 2013-14

1. Ms LW (Cambridgeshire CC Adult Safeguarding Team - Cambridge)

LW is a young woman with mental health and substance misuse issues; she lost her tenancy in 2006 when her children were taken into care. Since that time she has not had her own accommodation – she has had brief stays in hostels which she has not been able to maintain as her behaviour was too chaotic. She was then ‘staying’ with vulnerable men in their tenancies – she was not engaged with any services, she was a street drinker who was constantly getting involved with the criminal justice system. She was offered her own tenancy in February, but obviously had nothing to go in it!! Emmaus, Cambridge Central Aid and The Besom Trust were all utilised and some furniture and other items were obtained. “I (the authorised agent) applied to CLAS for a fridge freezer, cooker and washing machine – I was informed the same day that I was successful – the items were delivered and installed within two weeks. My client is absolutely thrilled, her flat is lovely, we meet there and have tea. She is a lot calmer, and is now starting to engage with the support available to her – she says it is because she likes to be in her own home today – she feels safe there and has no need to go elsewhere.”

Mrs AC (CHS - Cambridge)

Mrs AC was awarded clothing vouchers for her seven children and two single beds with bedding. She used the vouchers to get new clothing and shoes for school. Two boys were in very old beds both with a soiled mattress. She works part-time and tries really hard to support all children but has no spare funds for things like clothing etc. The children are used to wearing ‘hand me down’ clothes.

Miss H + children (Roddens Housing - Wisbech)

A high-risk domestic abuse victim received a fridge freezer, washing machine and cooker to replace items smashed by ex-partner. Receiving these items removed a huge weight off her mind and the offer of help through CLAS provided a way in to further assistance - Miss H was then given advice on benefits and signposted to other services (including police and other agencies).

Mrs MC (CHS - Meldreth)

Mr C had to give up work and become Mrs MC’s full time carer due to the constant agonising pain that she is in. This caused a significant drop in income. They have four young boys and were awarded a fridge/freezer, clothing vouchers (£100) and a single bed and bedding. Their fridge/freezer was old and not working properly and as they have 4 young boys they try to fill the freezer and always have a full fridge. One of the sons had issues at night with bed wetting; his mattress was very soiled and there was a smell upstairs. “He is so excited about his new bed that the bed wetting has decreased significantly.” They were able to buy school clothes with the clothing vouchers; “the boys loved it because they no longer had ‘grey’ polo shirts”.

Mrs AD (CHS - Cambridge)

Mrs AD was awarded a cooker. She is terminally ill with lung cancer and only has months to live. Her old oven had to be lit by a match right at the back inside and was very dangerous. Her husband has severe mental health issues and she was worried about his safety once she has gone.

Ms AB (Circle Housing Roddons – Fenland)

A young single mother who lived in a furnished studio flat with her small child. When she was offered a 2 bedroom flat by Circle Housing Roddons, she couldn't move in straight away as she had no cooker, fridge or furniture and no money to buy it all as she didn't expect it to happen so quickly. In social housing once an individual is offered a place, the viewing is arranged within a few days and often tenant has to sign tenancy agreement during the viewing. So, this young mother started her tenancy with arrears as her housing benefit was paid for the studio flat where she lived and not for the new place (as she didn't occupy it). The neighbourhood officer raised concern and we applied for the cooker and fridge for her. She got a Budgeting loan to pay for beds for herself and child. If there was no intervention from CLAS she wouldn't be able to move in for much longer which mean the arrears would mount up, and it would cost Roddons to chase her. Eventually Fenland District Council awarded DHP to cover the period the tenant didn't live in her new flat and they would have had to spend more if there was no CLAS intervention.

Mr FD (Together for Families Employment Adviser, DWP Job Centre Plus, Wisbech)

The father is a lone parent, historically unemployed with some mental health issues. He has got custody of his sons when they were about 5, some 7 years ago and initially relied on second hand furniture to furnish the property they lived in. With general wear and tear the boys bunk beds were no longer fit for use so they slept on the sofa cushions on the floor while he slept on what remained of the frame. This arrangement did not have a derogatory effect on their lives, the boys attended school etc. with no issues. The issues built up when the washing machine broke down and he was unable to launder the clothing and they could not go to school, bear in mind they also had few clothes as finances were tight. A school family worker suggested he visit Bright House in Kings Lynn and purchase a machine and beds for the boys. The client broke down while in the Jobcentre and said he couldn't afford to do that. I had previously advised my colleagues of CLAS and was happy to take an application from him. We were able to get the boys beds and bedding, a working washing machine and even a cooker as the one he had only had one working ring on it and no working oven. While the family support team from the school were right to focus on the children, it was apparent to me that as we were able to offer immediate and responsive help to the family from CLAS and solve the problem within days; the action to involve Social Services could be stepped down as the boys could return to school. The JCP could then focus on helping the client look towards training and work as these pressing worries had been solved.

I believe the case shows the lack of awareness of professionals of CLAS and it highlights the need for communication between professionals to provide a service to clients who need the support the most.