

CAMBRIDGESHIRE LOCAL ASSISTANCE SCHEME (CLAS) FOR 2016/17

To: **Adults Committee**

Meeting Date: **17 May 2016**

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

Electoral division(s): **All**

Forward Plan ref: **For key decision: n/a** **Key Decision: No**

Purpose:

- **To provide an update on CLAS**
- **To seek outline agreement to work up a new approach to CLAS arrangements that provides information and advice as well as access to goods and services**

Recommendation: **The Committee is recommended to:**

- **Consider the proposed alternative approach to providing a Cambridgeshire Local Assistance Scheme as outlined in Section 4.**
- **Support further investigation into this alternative approach.**
- **Agree further updates be provided to Adult Spokes rather than further reports to committee.**

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1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 In 2012, funding was devolved by Central Government to local authorities to develop schemes that would replace the national Social Fund/Crisis Loan/Community Care Grant arrangements. With relatively short notice and reduced funding, an approach was developed for the Cambridgeshire Local Assistance Scheme (CLAS) to provide practical, one-off, support for families and vulnerable individuals living in or moving into Cambridgeshire and facing exceptional pressures.
- 1.2 A tender was launched for an organisation to support the scheme. This was awarded to Charis Grants Ltd, for an initial term of 2 years from April 2013, with an extension at a reduced cost. A further extension has recently been agreed for the year 2016-17.
- 1.3 During 2015-16, the budget for CLAS included investment funding to enable investigation into making the scheme more sustainable in the long term. During 2015-16, the budget for CLAS was £386k, with access to contingency funds taking this up to £513k if necessary (following a recommendation from the General Purposes Committee in May). At the end of the year total spend was £306k.
- 1.4 In 2016-17 the budget has been set at £316k (after the application of a £70k business plan saving). There remains a £163k contingency in 2016-17 which has been allocated to the CFA budget (rather than held separately by GPC) during Business Planning. Given the spending level in 2015-16, Officers are proposing that this contingency is not required and is available for re-allocation. All proposals for 2016 and beyond included in this document do not include use of contingency funding.

2. REVIEWING THE CURRENT SCHEME

- 2.1 Applications to the scheme are made through 'authorised agents'. These are professionals who already work with vulnerable families and individuals (e.g. social workers, Children's Centres, housing providers, voluntary organisations and charities). The rationale behind the authorised agents approach is that the workers are fully aware of the needs and circumstances of the individuals they are supporting. The agents can apply on behalf of their clients for an award up to a value of £350. The applications set out the exceptional circumstances that have led to a need for food; white goods; furniture and beds; bedding; clothing; utility (gas/electricity). No cash awards are made. Full criteria and details can be found at: www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/clas
- 2.2 The agent is responsible for checking eligibility and stating the case for their client, giving details of the circumstances that have caused this need, how they have already attempted to resolve the situation and any other support in place.
- 2.3 The current scheme does not necessarily expect that clients will be provided with, or access, information and advice about money matters to help them in the longer term. Instead it focuses on the short term provision of practical goods or resources.

- 2.4 The quality of the application (and thus access to such goods) and additional money matters support is dependent on the experience of the agent and their knowledge of how the system works.
- 2.5 Charis Grants processes the application, checking their records to mitigate the risk of fraud and auditing 1 in 10 applications by requesting supporting evidence. They facilitate the award and supply the new goods. They have access to suppliers and the goods are charged to the scheme at below retail price, although are in the main new items.
- 2.6 The current scheme is heavily used by housing providers.
- 2.7 Monitoring of the scheme is based on data on the number of applications, type of need, location, award made etc. with no additional reporting on specific circumstances and ongoing support.
- 2.8 Evaluation of the impact of CLAS has not been built into the scheme, however, previously case examples have been utilised to provide evidence of the benefits of CLAS.
- 2.9 GPC agreed on 19 May 2015 to increase the current allocation of £350k to a maximum of £513k for CLAS as set out in the February 2015 Government's announcement confirming the allocations to Local Authorities for local welfare and health and social care needs, noting 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; and
 - b) The £513k funding would be reoccurring but a decision about the future funding of CLAS would be reviewed in the light of some plans to make CLAS more self-sustaining during 2015-16.
- 2.10 During the financial year 2015/2016 the funding was used as follows:
- £75k scheme administration
 - £200k direct delivery (provision of goods listed in 2.13)
 - £30k investment (investigating sustainability schemes see 2.15)
- Total: £305k
- There has been no use of the contingency funding made available by GPC in May 2015.
- 2.11 The spend on direct delivery reduced in 2015/16 due to fewer applicants.
- 2.12 The spend for direct delivery funding is set out below: Some applicants may receive more than 1 award depending on needs and circumstances, but in total not exceeding £350).

2.13	Award	No. of awards	Total cost
	Supermarket food vouchers	169	£5,570
	White goods	835	£145,381
	Furniture and beds	213	£24,006
	Bedding	202	£9,719
	Clothing vouchers	300	£13,262
	Utility payments	75	£2,978
	Total	1,794	£200,916

Applications received, by vulnerability group	
Family who meet eligibility criteria	390
Homelessness	196
Serious long term illness	119
Carers who receive or are entitled to carers allowance	34
Mental health	189
Young people leaving local authority care	12
Learning and physical disability / serious long term illness	98
Total received	1038

- 2.14 Of the 1038 applications received, 929 were successful. A number of applicants withdrew their application. In the main though an applicant was unsuccessful as they did not meet the eligibility criteria or were applying too soon after a previous award. Some applicants received more than one award hence the number of applicants and number of awards do not match.
- 2.15 Originally £100k was set aside for investments to investigate sustainability schemes with a series of outline proposals developed to utilise this resource and presented to committee on 7th July 2015 Each original proposal was investigated as to how it could be taken forward. These were:--
- 2.16 Using recycled goods with Cambridge Re-use– proposed investment £31,500. White goods currently feature highly on the budget spend, understanding opportunities to use recycled goods more effectively was seen as important. Work on the proposal to supply recycled white goods raised issues around installation and delivery of products and upon further investigation it was found that this would not be a viable, cost effective option via Cambridge Re-Use. Cambridge Re-Use submitted an alternative proposal to trial recycled fridges and freezers in the Cambridge City area with a view to expanding this if successful. The cost to the investment fund would be significantly less than detailed in the original proposal (£600). This was agreed by the Task & Finish group; however, due to issues between Cambridge Re-Use and their supplier they withdrew the proposal as they could not guarantee sufficient stock to meet CLAS clients' needs.
- 2.17 CAB Right Advice, Right Time project – investment £23,500 Investment to expand the Rural Cambridgeshire Citizen Advice Bureau led Right Advice, Right Time project to create a countywide universal information and advice service that offers quick and easy access to multiple advice agencies in the

whole of Cambridgeshire and to invest in volunteer training and development. This is CAB's digital response centre. Between October 2015 and January 2016 they dealt with approx. 400 new clients with 1100 issues; the majority presenting with debt, benefits, tax credits, employment and housing problems. 80% of these were resolved at first contact without the need to approach CLAS. The remaining 20% were signposted to other forms of support, some but not all of which may be to CLAS. This work is closely linked to Cambridgeshire County Council's vision and strategy.

2.18 Networking - proposed investment £1,000

Five area conferences to allow the authorised agents and other professionals providing crisis support to meet and build support networks, share data and continuing to shape strategic approach to crisis support. This plan for use of investment resource has not gone ahead as we recognised the need to develop the scheme. Instead, regular email updates have been sent to existing authorised agents and CLAS has been promoted to attract new agents. We will continue to communicate with agents via direct email, as required with a view to involving them in discussions and research around the future of CLAS and development proposals.

2.19 H-Cap/Love Oxmoor project – proposed investment £8,300

Proposal to introduce safety equipment, recycled white goods and furniture to their community shop and the development of a toolkit to be used to establish similar projects throughout the county. Work on this proposal identified that supplying goods through the community shop was not an option as the shop was very small, has no storage facility and if they were to maintain stock this would require ongoing investment and resource from CCC, and very practically the model is only to sell goods of £1 or less. Development of a toolkit for working with other areas was also not seen as an option for this organisation as the project was very much aimed at pooling resources and development to meet local needs.

2.20 Research into furnished lettings for vulnerable people – investment £6,375

The trigger analysis that was carried out in 2014 highlighted that providing furnished lettings to vulnerable tenants could sustain tenancies and lessen the demand for CLAS, for example applicants to the scheme may be coming out of homelessness with no means to furnish and establish their home and sustain their tenancy or may be fleeing domestic violence. CHS group agreed to investigate the workability of this. Their findings were to be reported by the end of March 2016 with recommendations.

2.21 Food banks

Following actions suggested by Adults Committee on 7 July 2015 we have encouraged food bank volunteers to apply to become CLAS agents. We worked with the Task and Finish Group, many of whom refer their clients to food banks around how they can ensure their clients make effective use of CLAS.

3. RESEARCH INTO ASSISTANCE SCHEMES AROUND THE COUNTRY

- 3.1 It has been difficult to evaluate the impact of the CLAS system in Cambridgeshire due to the monitoring process set out in the original contract.
- 3.2 Work has focussed on understanding more about the different approaches in place across the country, particularly those that focus on building people's resilience as well as being able to access goods for those with the most urgent needs. (All local assistance projects across the country were looked at: <http://www.cpag.org.uk/lwas>) Appendix 1 sets out more detail of some of the approaches considered based on research from other examples across the country.

4. OUTLINE PROPOSAL FOR NEW SCHEME

- 4.1 In developing an alternative approach CCC will work closely with district councils and other local partners to establish the range of needs of people in different parts of the county and how needs are currently addressed and reflected in their use of the current CLAS scheme. For example, East Cambridgeshire District Council is a relatively low user of CLAS and has recognised ways of targeting vulnerable families to identify their needs and provide early intervention before a crisis can escalate.
- 4.2 We will liaise with housing providers, the Department of Work and Pensions and existing providers of information and advice, e.g. CAB, to gather a broader picture of need within Cambridgeshire and to identify other forms of support that are available to avoid duplication.
- 4.3 Learning from the investment work, particularly the Right Advice, Right Time project which is already providing a first contact, information and advice led solution, we would like to test out an alternative approach to the CLAS scheme currently in operation and consider something akin to the schemes in Peterborough, Hampshire, Cumbria, and Leicestershire.
- 4.4 The suggested new arrangement would fund an organisation(s) to provide advice and problem resolution, with a focus on helping people to help themselves. The organisation would actively seek out alternative solutions e.g. charity, grants and support offered elsewhere (including the voluntary & community sector). They would aim to maximise benefits (e.g. free childcare, free school meals, heating grants); debt resolution; short term advances; budgeting loans, discretionary housing payments; affordable lending and savings e.g. Credit Unions; and access to other means of support, including food banks and utility vouchers, with financial support and access to goods being part of the solution to those most in need, rather than the primary service.
- 4.5 At this stage of research, our preferred option is one similar to Peterborough's PCAS (see appendix 1) where an external organisation in Peterborough, provides resolution in the form of advice and support to tackle the root cause of the problem for the applicant and avoid repetition. This would ensure consistency so that all clients receive the same standard of information and advice, from an accredited provider. Currently this is dependent on the

background and knowledge of the authorised agent who is making the application on their behalf. The proposed changes would allow people to self refer and their needs and eligibility for further support would be identified at the point of providing information and advice. We would still expect professionals working with vulnerable clients to identify their needs and signpost their clients to the new scheme, without the need for the authorised agent model.

- 4.6 A proportion of the overall funding, which will be determined based on research to be carried out, would be allocated to the provision of recycled furniture and refurbished white goods for people in need of immediate hardship resolution. Currently new white goods are provided.
- 4.7 In Peterborough the scheme is clearly measured and equated to avoided costs, such as the need to access statutory services, to demonstrate savings.
- 4.8 The proposed scheme aims to provide a lower cost and more sustainable approach for the Council to fund, and a service which seeks to support people to become more resilient, and enabling the most vulnerable to get financial support if this is imperative. We would expect the new model to operate at £300k per annum.
- 4.9 Evaluation of the scheme will be built into the new model in order to fully understand the impact for individuals and how it might mean the avoidance of costlier statutory services.
- 4.10 To develop this work further we are looking to:
 - Scope out an initial draft for consultation with key partners such as the district and city councils, DWP and the voluntary & community sector.
 - Test out any potential new approach with existing authorised agents.
 - Undertake a Community Impact Assessment.
 - If the new approach is seen positively, complete an appropriate procurement process with an intended start date of April 2017.
 - Following approval, updates would be received by Adult Spokes, rather than further reports into committee.

5. ALIGNMENT WITH CORPORATE PRIORITIES

5.1 Developing the local economy for the benefit of all

- 5.1.1 The following bullet points 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 through its support.
 - Having the right information and advice to prevent further financial problems will help people to manage their money and remain settled in their local community

5.2 Helping people live healthy and independent lives

- 5.2.1 The following bullet point sets out details of implications identified by officers:
 - CLAS has an important contribution to the health and independence of

people in exceptional circumstances, often with nowhere else to turn.

- The provision of information and advice, in addition to access to further support and goods will help to ensure that people are able to return to more settled lives and as result have regained their independence.

5.3 Supporting and protecting vulnerable people

5.3.1 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.
- Providing information and advice and intervention to prevent problems escalating or returning will contribute to this.

6. SIGNIFICANT IMPLICATIONS

6.1 Resource Implications

6.1.2 The following bullet point sets out details of implications identified by officers:

- The proportion of funding allocated to information and advice and how much will be retained to provide goods and furniture will need to be calculated based on research to be carried out.

6.2 Statutory, Risk and Legal Implications

6.2.1 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.
- **Risk:** Increased risk to people in crisis: It is hard to quantify whether those that have been supported by the existing CLAS scheme would have been more at risk if the scheme hadn't provided them with the assistance it did, in the way it did. The proposed scheme aims to provide information and advice, along with access to goods and services, to mitigate the risk of a problem or situation escalating or reoccurring.
- **Legal:** There are no significant legal implications within this category.

6.3 Equality and Diversity Implications

6.3.1 A Community Impact Assessment will be carried out on the proposed new scheme if the direction of travel is agreed by Committee.

6.4 Engagement and Consultation Implications

6.4.1 The report above sets out the implications for this priority in paragraph 4.1, 4.2 and 4.10.

6.5 Localism and Local Member Involvement

6.5.1 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 and this will be looked into with the involvement of the voluntary & community sector alongside the routes for moving the scheme forward.

6.6 Public Health Implications

6.6.1 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.
- The provision of information and advice can also signpost people to other organisations and support groups to help them to manage their health and wellbeing.

Source Documents

Source Documents	Location
Cambridgeshire CLAS Allocation of Funding paper Minutes of GPC meeting	GPC 19 May 2015
Cambridgeshire Local Assistance Scheme paper Minutes of Adults Committee	Adults Committee 7 July 2015

Appendix 1: Details of some of the local assistance schemes in place

Peterborough City Council's (PCC) Peterborough Community Assistance Scheme (PCAS)

This scheme is delivered by the CAB and is open to anyone over 16 living in the Peterborough area who is on means tested benefits and facing hardship or dealing with an emergency situation.

People must apply in person via the CAB who assess their situation and provide advice and ongoing resolution to financial and other related problems in the first instance. Once advice has been given, if necessary CAB facilitates access to food banks; emergency fuel payments; emergency recycled white goods (via their WEEE Re-Use facility) and furniture and other basic needs such as clothing, toys and household items (via CareZone charity using donated items). There is no financial limit to the award.

PCC uses the majority of its funding to pay for staff at the CAB to provide the advice and access to wider PCAS. The focus of PCAS is to get people out of their situation with advice rather than goods.

PCAS provides some funding to support foodbanks and recycled goods schemes.
<https://goo.gl/1qHwEA>

The infrastructure to deliver a scheme like PCAS in Cambridgeshire does not exist; there is no established countywide recycled goods centre or furniture distributor. Opportunities were explored during 2015/16 (2.15-2.21) and gave us a valuable insight into provision and its effectiveness on a small scale in localised areas. We have started investigating how this might work across the whole of Cambridgeshire and have met with the Waste Management Service on 4 April 2016. We are also liaising with PCC around their current networks for providing recycled furniture and white goods and how this could expand into Cambridgeshire.

PCAS/CLAS comparison

Impact evidence from PCC scrutiny day 2014 and CLAS grant making reports

- PCAS 2014/15 = 197 of 5367 clients received recycled white goods (3.5% of clients) total spend not reported.
- CLAS 2014/15 = 1651 of 3547 awards for new white goods (46.5% of awards / 74% of awards funding)
- CLAS 2015/16 = 835 of 1794 awards for new white goods (46.5% of awards / 73% of awards funding)
- PCAS 2015/16 data not yet available

Similar schemes operate in Southampton, Trafford and East Devon.

Hampshire Local Welfare Assistance

This scheme provides information and advice only and signposts to other organisations. No goods or services are provided. Links on website to food banks, money advice, grants and advances, charities and recycled goods.

<http://www3.hants.gov.uk/adultservices/local-welfare-assistance>

Similar schemes operate in Cumbria and Leicestershire.

Rotherham Crisis Loan Service

This scheme is run by a credit union offering interest free loans. Each applicant has a financial assessment.

<http://goo.gl/o1WNMx>

Similar schemes are provided by Wolverhampton, Sheffield and Wigan.