

CAMBRIDGESHIRE LOCAL ASSISTANCE SCHEME (CLAS) – ARRANGEMENTS FOR 2015-16

To: Adults Committee

Meeting Date: 26 March 2015

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

Electoral division(s): All

Forward Plan ref: 2015/033

Key decision: Yes

Purpose: To set out how the Cambridgeshire Local Assistance Scheme (CLAS) will operate from April 2015 following a decision made by the Adults Committee on 4 December. This decision asked officers to pursue an option that would bring greater sustainability to crisis support across the county and to prepare for a scenario where funding would no longer be available for welfare provision.

Recommendation: The Committee is asked to:

- a) Agree to the overall development of CLAS as set out in paragraph 3.1;
- b) Agree the continuation of direct provision for crisis support and resettlement as set out in paragraph 3.2;
- c) 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 (paragraph 3.3-3.8);
- d) Consider whether they wish 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) to support greater investment in initiatives that would lead to self-sustaining crisis support;
- e) Agree to the development of a full business case for the use of recycled white goods as part of the CLAS scheme.

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1.0 BACKGROUND

1.1 The Scheme So Far

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.

1.2 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 2014 (following a decision by Cabinet in April 2014) to allow a wider range of support to families in difficulties, including access to emergency fuel payments.

1.3 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.

1.4 Applicants cannot apply directly to the scheme but through their case officer or authorised agent who can confirm the circumstances of the applicant.

1.5 Funding for 2015-16 – The Current Position

On 3 February 2015, the Government reversed its decision not to fund local welfare provision:

In response to representations during consultation, we have now decided to allocate an additional £74 million to upper tier authorities, to assist them in dealing with pressures on local welfare and health and social care.

HM Government February 2015L LWP in 2015-16 Consultation Summaries of Responses

1.6 The County Council's share of this money is £513k and is for one year only. This money is not ring-fenced. Prior to the Government's announcement the County Council committed £350k (on a non-recurring basis) to fund local welfare assistance for 2015-16. This money was allocated from the Council's general reserve budget.

- 1.7 There have been discussions with a range of partners about possible financial contributions to the scheme. There was some hope that a number of public sector partners might provide some funding for the CLAS scheme but the hope of this has receded since the Government's announcement in February.

1.8 Developing the Scheme for 2015-16

A task and finish group was established late last year to oversee the development of the scheme for 2015-16 on the basis that funding for the scheme was likely to be limited and not at the same level as in previous years. The group has been extremely well attended and involved representatives from district councils, housing associations, CCG, county council, Charis Grants, CAB, DWP, Cambridge Central Aid and debt advice agencies.

- 1.9 The group looked at the current scheme, how it might be developed and how additional money for the scheme might be generated. In December last year the Adults Committee provided a clear steer that 2015-16 should be seen as a 'transitioning' year on the basis that funding beyond 2016 was likely to be reduced further or not be available at all. Officers were asked to consider ways in which the scheme could become more self-sustaining and reduce costs to a point where an exit from the scheme would still leave capacity in 'the system' to cope with people in crisis.

2.0 SHAPE OF THE SCHEME FOR 2015-16

- 2.1 Development of the scheme to date has suggested that the funding of £350k currently allocated to CLAS for 2015-16 should be spent in two ways:

- Maintaining a level of direct provision whilst continuing to find ways to reduce costs with an allocation of between £200K - £250K; and
- Investing a minimum of £100K in schemes that will build the capacity and infrastructure of communities and the voluntary sector to prevent people falling into crisis and will help crisis support to become more self-sustaining, integrated and resilient.

2.2 Continuation of Direct Provision

This will still cover both crisis assistance and re-settlement assistance. The proposal for direct provision is as follows:

- Retain the current eligibility criteria;
- Reduce total amount per application to £350 (currently £535, was originally £1,000);
- Apply an 'area formula' for funding to ensure resources are distributed more evenly across the county based on need;
- Reduce administration costs (which includes arrangements with links providers);
- Reduce the specification on all white goods which will be chosen from pre-determined 'packages' based on family size i.e. single

- person; single parent and 1 child;
- Retain emergency utility credit provision at the same level (£28 for an individual, £45 for a family);
- Reduce the value of clothing vouchers from £100 per person to £50 per adult and £25 per child and baby;
- Retain food vouchers for the time being but continue to explore alternative options e.g. 'Milk and More' delivery service; and
- Reduce spend further on white goods by bulk buying and using 'scratch and dent.' This could reduce the unit price of a single white good by up to 25%.

2.3 Investment in Schemes

It is recommended that investment should be made in building more capacity and sustainability into crisis support and help reduce costs further. The focus would be on 3 areas:

a) Communication and Networking (including consolidation of advice and information into a single source). Costs will be low and the aim is to use existing websites and sources of welfare and debt advice (e.g. Your Life Your Choice, CAB, Money Advice Service) and ensure these cover information about sources of crisis assistance and are more integrated. Work with authorised agents suggests regular networking is a valued way of agents to share information about sources of assistance and to work together to address common issues. Ideally, such networks should be self-organising and local. 2015-16 will be used to build this capacity with a view to asking district councils to be active in this work, possibly working through the local health partnerships (LHPs) or parish councils or other appropriate and established groups or networks.

b) Provision of white goods – A scheme is being developed to use re-cycled white goods for CLAS applicants. This scheme has the potential to generate significant savings so it is recommended that the proposal is taken to the next stage involving the development of a full business case. Investment will be made in other schemes that can reduce the cost of white goods provision.

c) Community and Voluntary Sector Capacity – This is based on the idea that by increasing the capacity of local communities and voluntary organisations to prevent and support those in crisis, CLAS could become more robust and self-sufficient particularly at 'holding' people out of crisis.

2.4 Discussions have already started with voluntary sector groups, key charities and authorised agents with regard to what schemes and ideas could be developed to make CLAS self-sustaining. In overall terms, it is anticipated that investment would be made in initiatives that:

- Expand existing activities, particularly those that focus on prevention;
- Develop new ways of supporting and preventing people falling into

crisis;

- Maximise the use of current resources and the work of partners that support people in crisis, particularly where this might attract additional funding; and
- Develop the infrastructure of local voluntary and community groups through investment in transport, buildings and IT.

2.5 At this stage it is hard to fully determine what level of investment might be required to make crisis support more self-sustaining and robust, particularly at 'holding' people out of crisis. A range of activities could be supported building on existing work or applying models from other service areas e.g. Troubled Families. Existing intelligence suggests the following areas might benefit from increased investment and contribute to making crisis support more robust and integrated:

- Increased capacity to offer financial and debt advice;
- 'Integrating' food banks more into the overall system of crisis support e.g. one stop shop for assistance, being able to offer more timely advice and information, more holistic assessment of need ;
- Increasing and maintaining volunteer capacity;
- Workforce development to enable those supporting people in crisis to act with greater confidence about what support can be offered and at what level;
- Schemes that sustain tenancies;
- Schemes that sustain employment and help people get into work;

2.6 It should be noted that investment in any schemes will be assessed against CLAS' current aims as well as a clear set of strategic and 'personal' outcomes. These are as follows:

SO1: Will make CLAS more self-sustaining

SO2: Will build capacity in the community to support people in crisis

SO3: Will help reduce costs

SO4: Will help prevent people falling into a crisis in the first place or prevent a crisis re-occurring

SO5: Supports infrastructure development e.g. transport, IT, buildings, skills training for workers

PO1: Contributes towards debt and financial management

PO2: Facilitates return to work, training, and/or education

PO3: Develops life skills e.g. financial management, parenthood, diet/cooking, family relationship

PO4: Builds self-reliance

PO5: Promotes health improvement post crisis (physical and mental)

PO6: Promotes ongoing independence following a crisis

2.7 The aim is to having a set of initial proposals for consideration for investment by mid-April. Some effort may be required to initially understand more fully what current activities exist in local communities and the voluntary sector have agreed to undertake this work.

3.0 GOVERNMENT ALLOCATION OF £513K FOR LOCAL WELFARE ASSISTENCE

3.1 The responses to the Government through the consultation on the

future funding for local welfare assistance have led to the announcement of additional funding for 2015/16 with an allocation of £513K for Cambridgeshire.

- 3.2 Increasing the allocation of £350K agreed by the General Purposes Committee to a maximum of £513K would allow a greater level of investment in infrastructure and voluntary sector provision to support a sustainable countywide response to people in need of urgent help. Increasing the funding available to support the types of initiatives and activities set out in paragraphs 2.4 and 2.5 would have the potential to strengthen these arrangements during 2015/16 and increase the ability of local organisations to deliver ongoing support to people in crisis in future years.

4.0 ALIGNMENT WITH CORPORATE PRIORITIES

4.1 Developing the local economy for the benefit of all

- 4.1.1 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.

4.2 Helping people live healthy and independent lives

- 4.2.1 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.

4.3 Supporting and protecting vulnerable people

- 4.3.1 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.

5.0 SIGNIFICANT IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Resource Implications

- 5.1.1 The resource implications surrounding CLAS are as follows:

- £350k has been allocated to the CLAS scheme for 2015-16;
- At this stage is it recommended that £200-£250k is allocated to funding direct provision with the remaining (£100k) being ear marked for investment in schemes to reduce costs and build greater sustainability into crisis support work;
- The allocation of funding for direct provision will be allocated on 'area formula' based on the number of benefit claimants in that area. This will ensure spend is targeted and driven by need.

- 5.1.2 In addition the committee is being asked to consider whether it wishes to ask the General Purposes Committee for a greater share of the £513k allocated to support welfare provision to support investment into making crisis support more self-sustaining and robust.

- 5.1.3 Officers will continue to explore ways of reducing costs within the scheme overall particularly with regard to the provision of white goods.

5.2 **Statutory, Risk and Legal Implications**

- 5.2.1 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.
- 5.2.2 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?

5.2.3 *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.

5.3 **Equality and Diversity Implications**

- 5.3.1 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.

5.4 **Engagement and Consultation Implications**

- 5.4.1 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.

- 5.4.2 Four consultation events were held in November 2014 and March 2015, largely attended by authorised agents. A short informal consultation about the changes for next year will take place between 11 and 23 March and any significant issues will be reported at the meeting. The outcome will be reported at the meeting.

5.5 Public Health Implications

- 5.5.1 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.

5.6 Localism and Local Member Involvement

- 5.6.1 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