

# North Somerset Council - Initial Equality Impact Assessment



## Overview

### Service or project area:

Welfare Provision Scheme – revision following implementation of UC

### Description of the proposal:

The Welfare Provision Scheme does not offer hardship payments and should not be confused with the Discretionary Housing Payment. The WPS scheme is to offer fulfilment of white goods and clothing etc and we currently work with a charity Changing Lives to offer goods. In some cases we offer Tesco spend cards which will provide household items and groceries. We work alongside the Food Bank and make referrals to them where we are not able to provide assistance.

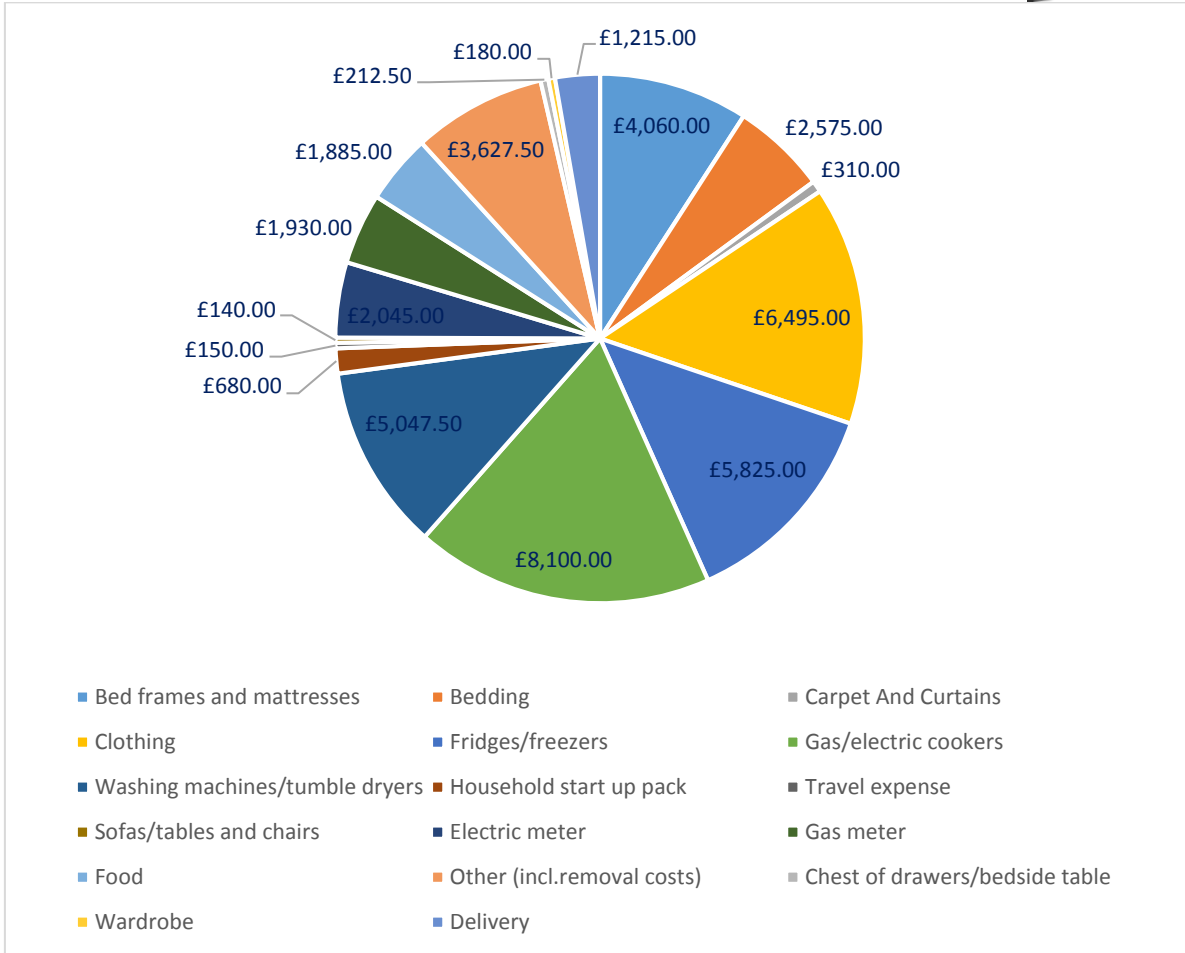
Following the implementation of UC the fund requires a small amount of adjustment. The Dept. for Work & Pensions (DWP) has a period of 6 weeks prior to any payments being made. This is due to change following the Budget and will be reduced to 5 weeks. Universal Credit waiting period will be abandoned by the DWP in February 2018. Also, the council will be able to continue to pay housing benefit for a 2 week period when the customer moves onto Universal credit. The DWP provides advance payments and budgeting loans to customers who are claiming Universal credit. Therefore funds are available elsewhere. The Job Centre and DWP has increased its support and directs customers towards these payments. Posters and advice are now readily available in job centres. Our team in the contact centre also are aware that UC customers need to be directed to the DWP for payments.

The DWP administer Universal Credit and have made available, funds, which include Advance Payment of UC and budgeting advance. This allows customers who are have made a claim for Universal credit to receive payment whilst waiting for the regular payment to be made.

The current budget for the WPS scheme has reduced over a period of time since the DWP transferred the responsibility to local authorities in April 2013. The fund has reduced from £200k a year to £70K a year for 17/18.

The current scheme provides customers who are in receipt of Housing Benefit, and other legacy benefits such as JSA, ESA and income support with household goods and food vouchers and cash to top up gas and electricity metres.

The WPS budget is very limited therefore by restricting the support to households allows the budget to be available to more households. Within the scheme we will always look at each case on its individual merit and there is a mechanism where the council can override its decision and provide goods to the household in certain circumstances particularly in domestic violence cases when a family has had to flee the household.



The annual spend can be seen on the pie chart and how it is split between items.

**Summary of changes:**

The Crisis payment and community grant payment will not be available if the customer is awaiting an award of benefit from the DWP. In these circumstances the customer can apply for a short term benefit advance and will be directed to the DWP to make a claim as detailed above.

The customer can also apply for a budgeting advance and other grants direct from the DWP which will help to pay for essential things like rent, furniture, clothes.

Redirect pregnant claimants who are in receipt of welfare benefits to the Sure Start grant which can be awarded at 29 weeks or new born until they reach 1 year. This provides a grant which is not repayable of £500.00. (DWP)

Reduce the number of awards from two (2) in any rolling year to one (1) per customer. This will allow the budget to be available to more customers and protect the service in the future.

Remove the award of rent in advance from the scheme as this will be picked up through the DWP and for through the existing Discretionary Housing Payment scheme (DHP).

Reiterate that the community grant scheme is there for vulnerable customers who have been displaced such as those in receipt of a care package and are leaving that accommodation; support to prevent a move into residential care or hospital; upheaval due to domestic violence etc.

### Customer equality impact summary

Will the proposal have an impact on any of these groups? Insert X into one box per row.					Impact (positive/ negative/ both)
	High	Medium	Low	None	
Disabled people			X		
People from different ethnic groups			X		
Men and women (including pregnant women or those on maternity leave)			X		
Lesbian, gay or bisexual people				X	
People on a low income			X		
People in particular age groups				X	
People in particular faith groups				X	
People who are married or in a civil partnership				X	
Transgender people				X	
Other specific impacts, for example: carers, parents, impact on health and wellbeing.  Please specify:				X	

### Explanation of customer impact

Identified in the impact assessment are the following:-

People on a low income

The policy is there to assist people on low or no income and will be claiming Universal Credit so will be affected by the change. The council has trained officers who will provide budgeting



support and part of this process is to maximise either income, so will be signposted to Third Sector organisations.

The scheme will remain available but customers who are claiming Universal Credit may experience delay in receiving payment from the DWP and therefore will need to contact them for an advance payment. The WPS scheme has never provided a cash amount in lieu of benefits pending.

### Pregnancy

The WPS scheme currently provides a full service offering for clothing and food, nappies and furniture etc for households where the customer or partner is pregnant. To help protect the fund all customers who are in receipt of welfare benefits will be redirected to the DWP who will make a payment to the customer of an amount not exceeding £500.00. This is a grant and is not repayable to the DWP.

## Staff equality impact summary

Are there any staffing implications for this proposal?

Yes

No

### Explanation of staff impact

<< where an impact has been identified above insert explanation of impact here >>

If yes, how many posts could be affected? State whether they are current vacant, or filled permanently or temporarily.

<< insert text here >>

## Review and Sign Off

### Directorate Equality Group

When was this assessment reviewed by the Directorate Equality Group?

<< insert date here >>

Is a further detailed equality impact assessment needed?

Yes

No

If 'yes', when will the further assessment be completed? << insert date here >>

**Service Manager:** << insert name here >>

**Date:** << insert date here >>

**If this assessment identifies a medium or high risk then a Full Equality Impact Assessment needs to be completed**