

REPORT TO THE CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE POLICY & SCRUTINY PANEL

DATE OF MEETING: 23RD MARCH 2018

SUBJECT OF REPORT: WELFARE PROVISION SCHEME

TOWN OR PARISH: ALL

OFFICER/MEMBER PRESENTING: RICHARD PENSKA, HEAD OF SUPPORT SERVICES PARTNERSHIP & CUSTOMER SERVICES

KEY DECISION: NO

RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Panel receives and considers the contents of this report providing further information and clarification regarding the council's Welfare Provision Scheme.

1. SUMMARY OF REPORT

The report outlines the issues raised by the Children & Young People Services Policy & Scrutiny Panel on 23rd January 2018 in its consideration of the changes proposed in the council's Welfare Provision Scheme (CSD Decision 109) and provides the further information and clarification sought by the Panel.

The decision to amend the scheme has been reviewed by the Executive Member, following further advice and information from officers, who has concluded that the decision is not to be implemented at this stage.

2. POLICY

The council's Welfare Provision Scheme assists vulnerable people in meeting their needs for subsistence or financial support where they are unable to meet their immediate short term needs in the case of a crisis or where they require assistance to maintain their independence within the community.

3. DETAILS

Following the meeting of the Children & Young People Services Policy & Scrutiny Panel on 23rd January 2018 and the following discussion around the issues raised, the Panel concluded that not all of the relevant information had been provided in the decision notice and some information had been inconsistent. It was therefore resolved that the decision be reconsidered by the Executive Member; and that in doing so, consideration be given to the specific issues raised in discussion by the Panel. The decision has subsequently been reviewed by the Executive Member and, based on further information and advice from officers, he has concluded that the decision is not to be implemented at this stage. Taking account of the matters raised by the Panel, it is proposed to defer the decision to allow consideration for a redesign of the scheme, and a new decision will be presented later in the year.

The specific issues raised by the Panel were as follows:

- a) inconsistencies in the financial data;
- b) concerns about the impact on children of a reduction in the permitted number of claims;
- c) there was no direct reference in the policy to children (eg in an impact assessment); and
- d) there was insufficient supporting information within the decision notice;
- e) the sustainability of the WPS budget was questionable and consideration should be given to whether it was set at an appropriate level.

Financial data

The level of expenditure relating to crisis payments has been managed down over recent years this is driven by a number of factors:

1. the original grant for the payments was subsumed into the RSG which has been reduced over time, therefore the scheme spend is effectively operated via the Housing Benefit reserve;
2. the call centre signposts many applicants who are in financial crisis due to late benefit payments to the DWP who operate a separate crisis payments scheme for these applicants;
3. an element of assistance is provided at reduced rates by using partners such as Foodbank and Changing Lives;
4. observationally, as the scheme provides limited cash payments, it is not less likely to open to abuse or speculative applications.

The fund operates at a target level of £75k for 2017/18 and a breakdown of expenditure is provided below.

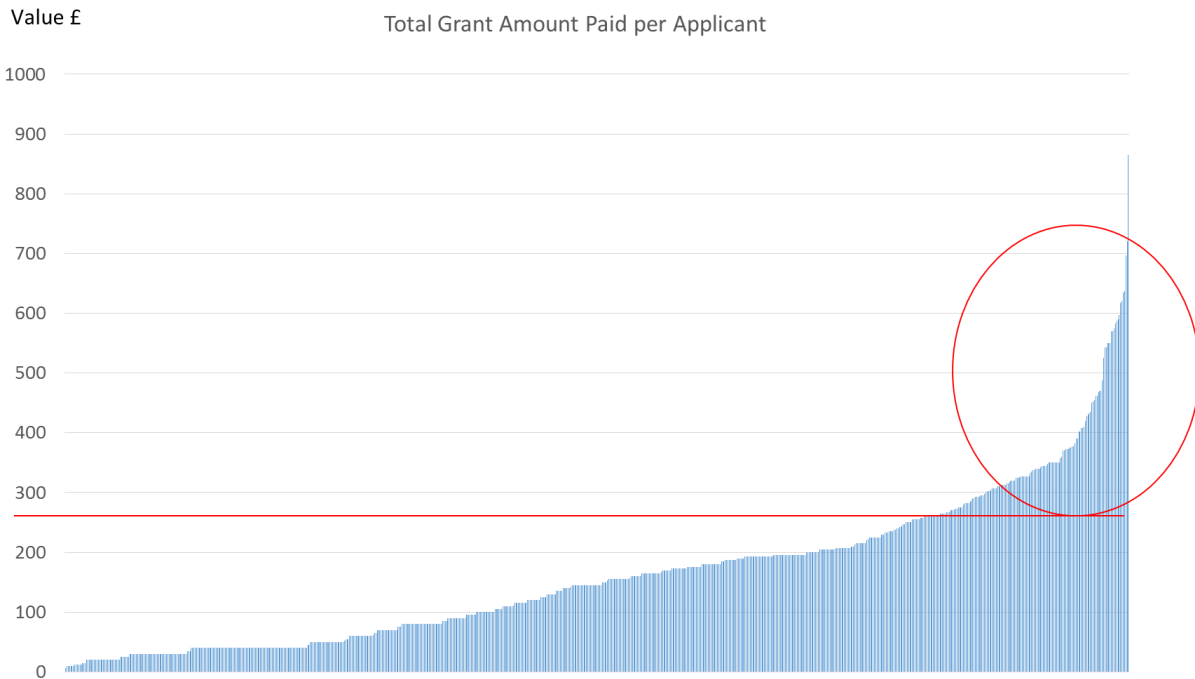
Areas of expenditure	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18 to date	Totals	% of Spend
Bed frames and mattresses	£11,335	£6,180	£4,795	£22,310	8.0%
Bedding	£6,935	£5,505	£2,815	£15,255	5.4%
Carpet And Curtains	£2,775	£505	£375	£3,655	1.3%
Clothing	£14,045	£14,525	£7,095	£35,665	12.7%
Fridges/freezers	£12,915	£6,580	£6,185	£25,680	9.2%
Gas/electric cookers	£23,640	£16,543	£9,255	£49,438	17.6%
Washing machines/tumble dryers	£11,115	£8,268	£5,738	£25,120	9.0%
Household start up pack	£184	£2,440	£680	£3,304	1.2%
Removal costs	£905	£895	£0	£1,800	0.6%
Travel expense	£768	£250	£150	£1,167	0.4%
Sofas/tables and chairs	£300	£100	£140	£540	0.2%
Electric meter	£7,815	£5,370	£2,279	£15,464	5.5%
Gas meter	£6,110	£4,610	£2,109	£12,829	4.6%
Food	£21,680	£17,625	£16,895	£56,200	20.0%
Other	£1,686	£3,009	£4,068	£8,762	3.1%
Chest of drawers/bedside table		£555	£213	£768	0.3%
Wardrobe		£810	£180	£990	0.4%
Delivery (Changing Lives)			£1,440	£1,440	0.5%
	£122,208	£93,769	£64,411	£280,387	100%

Scale of awards:

An analysis of WPS awards has been conducted for 21 months (up to December 2017):

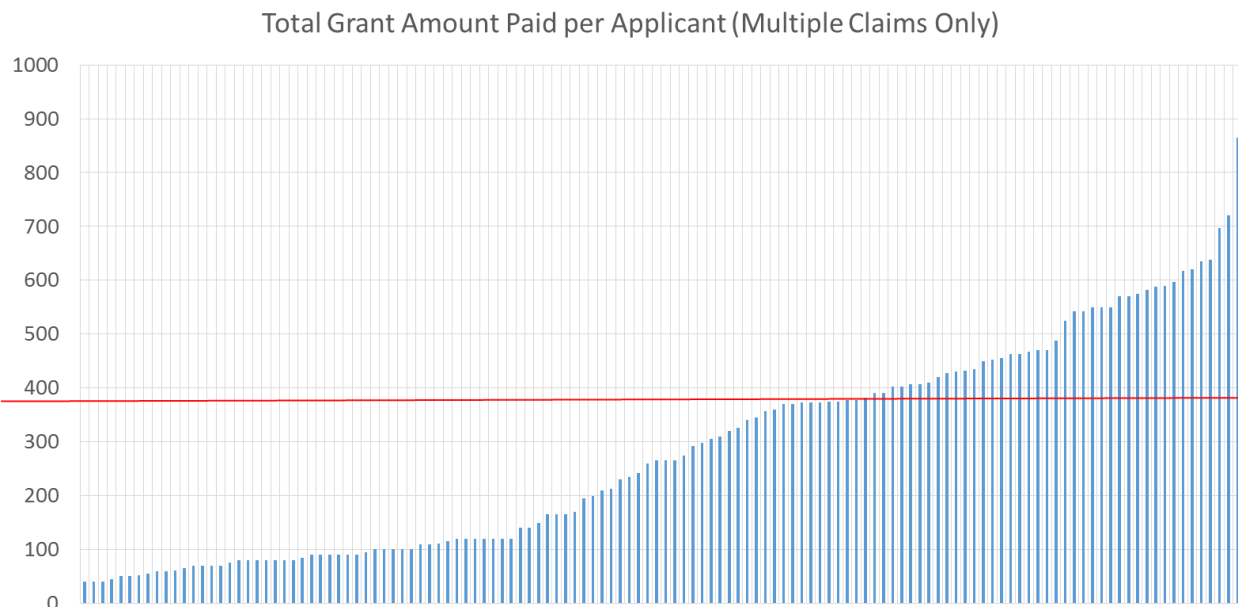
In that period 1435 number of awards were made and the value of those awards was distributed as follows.

A significant number of those awards to individuals (96) were over £350 in value.



A sample of these claims (30) indicates that these higher end awards relate to community grants for the provision of white goods and bedding for households and individuals being rehoused or located within the area.

A review of multiple claims (252) for the same period shows the following award distribution:



Impact on Children

An analysis of successful claims from April 2016 to December 2017 identifies that of the 1435 successful claims:

Claims for Single Claimant	1280
Claims for a Couple	155
Claims with Children	445
Claims without children	990

So approximately 31% of claims relate to families with children.

This is comparable with a similar pattern seen by the Weston-super-Mare Food Bank who report that 30% of their assistance for this financial year was to applicants with children. There is no system weighting applied to the application process to assist those applicants with children, although these applications are prioritised by the call handlers. The proposed reduction in the number of claims to one successful claim a year will impact on approx. 15% of applicants, an examination of successful claims in 2016/17 identifies that 126 were multiple claims of 6 which related to applicants with children.

Policy reference to Children

The policy does not directly refer to the children, but it is clear that it provides assistance to those in crisis. It is acknowledged that a future revision should be explicit over support for families in crisis or help with relocation costs.

Level of WPS budget & sustainability

At present the Welfare Provision Scheme is funded from the Housing Benefit reserve with an indicative annual budget set of £75k. This is reviewed annually with regard to anticipated demand and affordability, and will need to be brought into the council's base revenue budget from 2019/20.

There are clear economic triggers that impact on the sustainability of the current budget and the service will continue to monitor overall levels of indebtedness; unemployment and other economic markers with a view to setting future financial levels of the scheme.

4. CONSULTATION

None required. The report is for information only.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Included within the report.

6. LEGAL POWERS AND IMPLICATIONS

Not applicable, the report is for information only

7. RISK MANAGEMENT

Not applicable.

8. EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

Not applicable, the report is for information only.

9. CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

None at this stage.

10. OPTIONS CONSIDERED

Not applicable.

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BACKGROUND PAPERS

CSD Decision 109 - Welfare Provision Scheme 2018/19 amendments and associated EIA.