

LOCAL WELFARE ASSISTANCE

Cabinet Member Cllr Neal Davey
Responsible Officer Benefit Manager

Reason for Report: To provide update on progress of the scheme.

RECOMMENDATION(S): Following successful introduction of the new scheme, the results and achievements be noted.

Relationship to Corporate Plan: The scheme aims to support the reduction for welfare dependency, while at the same time providing help for those most in need.

Financial Implications: Monitoring of fund to avoid over/underspend.

Legal Implications: None.

Risk Assessment: The Council has been given limited funds so any overspend will be a cost to the General Fund.

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 From April 2013 the government devolved funding to upper tier authorities to create a Local Welfare Assistance scheme. This replaces elements of the Social Fund previously administered by the Department for Work and Pensions. Devon County Council (DCC) delegated the funding to the District Councils.
- 1.2 The guidelines for administration of the new Local Welfare Scheme in Mid Devon were approved by the Community Well Being PDG on 26 March 2013.
- 1.3 The aims of the scheme, as agreed the by Devon Local Government Steering Group, are to:
 - i) Increase self-reliance and resilience
 - ii) Provide quick and effective support for those with high priority, short term needs
 - iii) Help people to establish themselves in, or remain in, the community.
- 1.4 Given the short timescale and lack of resource within the Council, officers felt external organisations with the necessary skills and knowledge would be best placed to deliver the new scheme.
- 1.5 A working group, including external support groups, charities and voluntary sector organisations, formed to discuss the best scheme for the residents of Mid Devon. From the discussions it became clear these organisations may

struggle with additional demand as they were already under pressure dealing with their clients affected by the economic downturn and welfare cuts.

- 1.6 A tender document was drawn up for a fully managed service. The contract was awarded to 'Money£wise', a partnership between Encompass Southwest and Wessex Resolutions C.I.C., two well established not-for-profit organisations.
- 1.7 Under the contract, Money£wise fully administer the application process for MDDC. This includes receiving applications (whether made online, by telephone or on hard copy application form), assessing the applications against eligibility criteria, scoring the applications accordingly and making a decision on whether the application is successful. They then advise the applicant and work with them to agree an action plan and resolve debt problems.
- 1.8 Applicants are required to demonstrate their need cannot be met by any other source. Where appropriate, the applicant may be directed to other agencies or council services with instructions on how to access any support.
- 1.9 The food banks, which were prepared to accept referrals from LWA, advised they had sufficient donations of food, therefore officers felt a grant to each organisation would acknowledge their assistance and provide support. The food banks agreed to accept the grant and have used this to maintain their facilities and support their volunteers.

2.0 **Financial**

- 2.1 Devon County Council allocated funding for 2013/14 of £111,590 plus an administration grant of £23,580.
- 2.2 Indicative funding allocations for 2014/15 were similar to the above, however exact figures will be dependent on the outcome of the Government Spending Review expected in September/October.
- 2.3 DCC, as the accountable body, will retain a 10% contingency. The allocation will be reviewed after six months and any funding not spent by the end of the financial year has to be returned to DCC.
- 2.4 Spend to 31 July 2013 is £57,276.32 (see breakdown at Appendix A).

3.0 **Delivery**

- 3.1 Initially, the means of support we were able to fund/provide were limited to money advice, food vouchers/referrals to food banks, furniture referrals for pre-used and new goods and rent deposits.
- 3.2 Further means of support have been given towards electricity, gas and removal costs.

- 3.3 A total of 180 applications were received between 1 April and 31 July 2013. A breakdown of the types of application, together with the outcomes, are shown in the following tables.

Request for Assistance					
	Apr- 13	May- 13	Jun- 13	Jul- 13	TOTALS
Food Parcel	17	27	20	45	109
Furniture	3	6	10	13	32
Fuel	0	0	0	5	5
Money Advice	0	5	7	13	25
Removal Costs	0	0	1	0	1
Rent					
Arrears/Advance	0	3	4	1	8
TOTALS	20	41	42	77	180

Outcomes					
	Apr- 13	May- 13	Jun- 13	Jul- 13	TOTALS
Food Parcel	12	24	16	36	88
Furniture	0	5	10	5	20
Money Advice	0	2	5	14	21
Removal Costs	0	0	1	0	1
Rent					
Arrears/Advance	0	2	3	0	5
TOTALS	12	33	35	55	135

4.0 Review

- 4.1 Contract monitoring is on-going to identify any issues and seek prompt solutions.
- 4.2 All applications, rejections and complaints will be reviewed together with the eligibility criteria to ensure the scheme is accessible to residents in the greatest need and that they are being supported where possible.
- 4.3 Further meetings have been arranged with the external organisations that helped with the design of our scheme to discuss current demand and to consider any:
- i) pressure and strain on existing local services
 - ii) additional support that may be required through the winter, e.g. help with cost of fuel for heating, lighting and cooking.

4.4 DCC has asked the Community Council of Devon to undertake a review of the Local Welfare schemes in each authority across Devon. This will involve interviews with customers, suppliers, money advice staff and local voluntary organisations. The findings from the report will be completed by the end of November 2013.

Contact for more Information: Dawn Harris, Benefit Manager, 01884 234372
dharris@middevon.gov.uk

Circulation of the Report: Cllr Neal Davey, Management Team

Appendix A

LOCAL WELFARE ASSISTANCE

Annual Expenditure

Money£wise	£47,000.00
Grants (inc food banks, furniture, CHAT, Crediton congregational church, People Matter St Andrews, Cullompton and Turntable, Exeter	£8,000.00
TOTAL	£55,000.00

Other Expenditure 2 April to 31 July 2013

Electrical – 10 mini ovens	£448.33
Electrical – microwave	£39.99
Furniture – recycled	£1508.00
Gas/electricity key meter top-up (advance to provider)	£100.00
Removal expenses	£2,276.32
GRAND TOTAL	£57,276.32