

**REPORT TO:** Corporate Policy and Performance Board

**DATE:** 6<sup>th</sup> January 2015

**REPORTING OFFICER:** Strategic Director – Policy and Resources

**PORTFOLIO:** Resources

**SUBJECT:** Discretionary Support Scheme

**WARD(S):** Borough-wide

## **1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT**

1.1. The purpose of the report is to provide a progress update regarding the operation of the Council's Discretionary Support Scheme.

## **2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS: That**

- (i) progress with the operation of the Council's Discretionary Support Scheme be noted; and**
- (ii) in accordance with the Executive Board minute EXB122 (2012) (and the delegation contained therein), it is recommended that the proposed amendments to the Scheme outlined in Appendix B, be approved.**

## **3.0 BACKGROUND**

3.1 The Discretionary Support Scheme, which was previously administered by The Department of Work and Pensions (DWP), was abolished by the Welfare Reform Act from April 2013. At this time Crisis Loans (CL), for general living expenses and Community Care Grants (CCG) were replaced by a new service administered by the Council. This Board was instrumental in developing the key aspects of the Council's Scheme.

3.2 The Scheme has now been in operation since April 2013 and a number of progress reports have been presented to the Board. The Discretionary Social Fund Topic Group met on 20<sup>th</sup> November 2014 to review progress with the Scheme. A number of amendments to the original scheme have previously been approved and the Corporate Policy & Performance Board Topic Group proposed some further changes, which are shown in Appendix B. Delegated authority exists for minor amendments to the scheme to be made by the Strategic Director, Policy and Resources in consultation with the Portfolio holder, following consultation with the Board (Minute EXB 122 (2012) of the Executive Board refers).

## **4.0 UPDATE AT THE END OF QUARTER 2 2014/2015**

4.1 At the end of Quarter 2 £171,000 had been paid out of the Discretionary Support Scheme. This is the grand total of payments made, and includes transfers to the Discretionary Housing Payment Fund and the provision of money advice previously agreed by the Board.

4.2 Appendix A presents details regarding the applications to the Scheme so far during 2014/15, numbers of awards and reasons for rejection.

## **5.0 Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) Feedback**

5.1 Feedback had been received from the local CAB regarding the operation of the Scheme, together with some suggestions for changes. This feedback was presented to Members of the Corporate Policy & Performance Board Topic Group on 20<sup>th</sup> November 2014.

5.2 It was agreed that a detailed response would be prepared by the Strategic Director, Policy and Resources and shared with the Chairman. This has been done and the response agreed and forwarded to the CAB.

## **6.0 FUNDING**

6.1 In 2013/14 the DWP allocated funding of £649,000 towards the Discretionary Social Scheme. Any unspent money at the end of the year was retained by the Council and carried forward for the Scheme in 2014/15.

6.2 For 2014/15 £649,000 has again been allocated but the DWP, however they propose to monitor expenditure and withhold monies if it feels that any individual local authority was not on course to spend its allocation.

6.3 The position is still unclear regarding whether there will be any funding for the Scheme in 2015/16. This may become clearer once the Local Government Grant Settlement is announced in late December, therefore a verbal update will be provided at the meeting.

## **7.0 CONCLUSION**

7.1 In overall terms the Discretionary Support Scheme has met the needs of people in genuine need. The Scheme is being managed within budget, which was always a major concern for the Board. The decision of the Board not to pay cash has proved to be correct one and the decision to amend the Scheme in-year in order to pay fuel costs has been very helpful.

7.2 Appendix B presents changes proposed for the Scheme, which are required to take account of the introduction of Universal Credit, to clarify the position regarding the number of awards permitted each year and to enable the Scheme to assist customers who are in full time education and where they have no other alternative support available. The Topic Group of this Board duly considered these proposed changes at its meeting held on 20 November 2014.

## **8.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES**

8.1 It has the potential to affect all Council priorities.

## **9.0 RISK ANALYSIS**

9.1 Payments will be monitored from the Scheme to ensure that these remain within budget.

9.2 A report will be submitted to the corporate Policy & Performance Topic Group at the end of the 2014/15 financial year.

## **10.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES**

10.1 The eligibility criteria and application process would have to ensure that no particular groups of individuals were excluded. An Equality Impact Assessment will need to take place on any amended Scheme.

## **11.0 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972**

<b>Document</b>	<b>Place of Inspection</b>	<b>Contact Officer</b>
Various letters from the Department of Works and Pensions	Revenues & Benefits & Customer Services Division Kingsway House Widnes	Peter McCann

## Appendix A

### Total applications so far received in 2014/15

2014/15	Total Received	Total Granted	Total Awarded
April	218	99	£ 12,547
May	180	75	£ 6,817
June	213	92	£ 11,579
July	243	119	£ 14,980
August	209	95	£ 13,111
September	223	100	£ 10,752
October	220	103	£ 12,427
November	222	108	£ 15,784
December	27	9	£ 844
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,755</b>	<b>800</b>	<b>£ 98,842</b>

### Split between types of Application received so far in 2014/15

2014/15	Emergency Support				Community Support			
	No. Apps	No. Granted	No. Refused	Awarded £	No. Apps	No. Granted	No. Refused	Awarded £
April	158	77	81	£ 3,984	60	22	38	£ 8,563
May	148	67	81	£ 4,235	32	8	24	£ 2,582
June	159	68	91	£ 3,720	54	24	30	£ 7,859
July	179	87	92	£ 4,560	64	32	32	£ 10,421
August	166	79	87	£ 4,064	43	16	27	£ 9,047
September	174	85	89	£ 5,282	49	15	34	£ 5,471
October	155	78	77	£ 3,755	65	25	40	£ 8,671
November	151	86	65	£ 4,540	71	22	49	£ 11,243
December	19	7	12	£ 323	8	2	6	£ 521
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,309</b>	<b>634</b>	<b>675</b>	<b>£ 34,463</b>	<b>446</b>	<b>166</b>	<b>280</b>	<b>£ 64,378</b>

## Reasons for Applications being rejected so far in 2014/15

Reasons For Rejection	
Not a Halton Resident	81
Customer Sanctioned	39
Alternative help available	406
Requested Cash	39
Signposted to approved partner to complete application	2
Criteria Check	290
Withdrawn Application	6
Two Awards Within 12 Months	85
Not Eligible	7
	<b>955</b>

## Types of Award made so far in 2014/15

<b>Awarded Items</b>	
Food Packs	991
Vegetarian Food Pack	10
Gluten Free Food Pack	5
Nut Allergy Food Pack	10
Toiletry Pack	21
Bedding Only	19
Single Bed with bedding	115
Single Bed	8
Single Mattress	10
Double Bed	3
Double Bed with bedding	8
Double Mattress	4
Bunk Beds with Bedding	2
Bunk Bed	2
Cot with bedding	5
Sofa's	96
Sets of curtains	132
Cooker	48
Washing machine	2
Fridge	3
Kitchen equipment	100
Table and Chairs	1
Clothing	5
Toiletry Pack	1
Pram	2
Fuel	307
Removals	12
Cooker Connections	5
<b>Total Items Awarded</b>	<b>1,927</b>

## **Appendix B**

### **Suggested amendments to the Discretionary Support Scheme as detailed further below:**

1. Amendment to Section 4.1 Criteria
2. Amendments to Section 5.12 Eligibility check
3. Amendment to Appendix B - Excluded claimants not eligible to awards of the Discretionary Support Scheme
4. Amendment to Appendix B – Remove People treated as in full-time relevant education

**Detailed explanations are provided on the following page**



## 1. Amendment to Section 4.1 Criteria

- There is a requirement to insert wording to make reference to Universal Credit in the criteria to determine eligibility to support from DSS scheme.
- Universal Credit can be paid as a replacement for out-of-work benefits or as a top-up income for those who are working in low paid employment on reduced hours.
- **Recommend** insert “non-working Universal Credit” into the table at Section 4.1 of the eligibility criteria as detailed below

## 2. Amendment to Section 5.12 Eligibility check

- There is a requirement to insert wording to make reference to Universal Credit in eligibility check criteria.
- **Recommend** insert “non-working Universal Credit” into the text at section 5.12 about the eligibility check as detailed below.

## 3. Amendment to Appendix B (excluded claimants not eligible to awards of the Discretionary Support Scheme)

- It would be helpful to change wording to remove “Emergency Support” as a specified type of support a person has received. The scheme intention is that a person is excluded from assistance if they have had two awards in the last 12 months whether that was emergency or community assistance.

**Recommend** replace the paragraph below:

- *The claimant or their partner have been awarded Emergency Assistance twice in the last 12 months (unless good cause has been established)*

With the following text:

- *The claimant or their partner have received two Discretionary Support awards within the last 12 months (unless good cause has been established)*

#### 4. Amendment to Appendix B – (excluded claimants not eligible to awards of the Discretionary Support Scheme)

- It is suggested to remove the line ***People treated as in full-time relevant education*** from the exclusion list. The reason for removing the line is to enable the scheme to assist customers who are in full time education and where they have no other alternative support available. We have recent experience of a customer who started full time education and waiting on a grant to be awarded and the customers DWP benefits had stopped (due to starting full time education). The customer had no one else to turn to for help.
- The removal of the line will mean that we can assist customers in this situation in the future.
- **Recommend** remove wording “***People treated as in full-time relevant education***”.