



Rutland County Council

LOCAL WELFARE CRISIS PROVISION - REVIEW OF 2013/14 DATA

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Summary of document

To provide members with an analysis of the local welfare crisis provision for financial year 2013/14, to inform a decision around the future of the scheme criteria and funding.

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1.0 BACKGROUND

- 1.1 The government abolished the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) administered Crisis Loans and Community Care Grants from 1 April 2013. All Councils with County Council functions were given funding to develop a local scheme. A significant amount of work was undertaken including consultation with parish and town councils and the third sector to develop a local welfare crisis provision for 2013/14. The Council decided to adopt the same scheme for 2014/15 given the limited data available.
- 1.2 A full year of data for 2013/14 is now available for analysis, which has enabled a review of the scheme from 2015/16 onwards.

2.0 FUNDING OF THE SCHEME

- 2.1 Central Government has provided the following funding to Rutland County Council:

Year	Set-up funding	Scheme funding	Administration funding
2012/12	£231.00	nil	nil
2013/14	nil	£23,116	£4,884
2014/15	nil	£23,116	£4,447

- 2.2 Spending of funding for 2013/14 is detailed in the table below:

Funding for 2013/14	Total spend for 2013/14	Total underspend for 2013/14
£23,116	£13,260	£9,856

- 2.3 The Council carried forward the underspend in 2013/14 of £9,856 to 2014/15 crisis funding provision. No further funding is expected from central government.

3.0 CRISIS SUPPORT ACTIVITY DATA 2013/14 AND 2014/15 QTR2

- 3.1 263 applications were received in 2013/14, of these 196 were successful and received an award.
- 3.2 The following table details the type and amount awarded:

Type of award	Total amount awarded	Number of awards
Community Care Grant equivalent	£4,147.93	23

Crisis Loan equivalent	£9,112.07	173
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3.3 The awards are made up of the following type of award:

Type	Number awarded
Cash	109
Good procured i.e. fridge	16
Supermarket voucher	97
Food Bank voucher	40
Fuel voucher	35
Other	4

3.4 Some applicants were awarded multiple items, hence the total exceeds 196 awards; being the total number of successful awards.

3.5 The average **cash payment** award is £44.60.

3.6 The most common needs being met through the award of cash payments is: Fuel for heating, lighting and cooking, household items and food.

3.7 The average value of **procured goods** award is £262.37. This is higher than the average cost of a single items detailed in 6.3 in the report as some awards are for 2 or 3 items. I.e. a furniture package and a fridge.

3.8 The most common needs being met through the award of procured goods are for example, Homeless person being housed for the first time, person fleeing domestic violence. A variety of suppliers are used including Melton Furniture Project, Second Hand City and local retailers.

3.9 The average value of a **supermarket vouchers** award is £36.80.

3.10 The most commons needs being met through the award of supermarket vouchers is food and toiletries.

3.11 **Food bank vouchers** do not have a monetary value and can be redeemed at a local food bank.

3.12 A payment of £500 was made to the local food bank to fund set-up costs. This payment was made to the Oakham Trusell Trust from the administration funding provided from central government.

3.13 The following table details applications by Ward:

Ward	Total	%
Braunston and Belton	0	0%

Cottesmore	5	2%
Exton	9	3%
Greetham	3	1%
Ketton	7	3%
Langham	11	4%
Lyddington	0	0%
Martinsthorpe	2	1%
Normanton	7	3%
Oakham North East	61	23%
Oakham North West	46	17%
Oakham South East	15	6%
Oakham South West	35	13%
Ryhall & Casterton	3	1%
Uppingham	30	11%
Whissendine	7	3%
<i>Homeless</i>	22	8%
	263	

3.14 Majority of the awards are made by residents in Oakham and Uppingham. On further analysis 70 applications were received from Spire homes tenants and of these 53 were awarded.

3.15 The average age of applicants received in 2013/14 is as follows:

Age range	Number of applicants
Less than 25	64
25 to 59	177
60 plus	13
Not disclosed	9
TOTAL	263

3.16 The following table details the number of multiple applications received in 2013/14:

Multiple application	Number of claimants
Applying once	77
Applying twice	25
Applying more than 3 times	14
Applying more than 4 times	23

3.17 Common reasons for repeat applications are:

- Poor budgeting skills;
- DWP sanctions and complications with providing evidence for claims to DWP;

- Complex personal relationships and numerous household membership changes which has interrupted DWP administered benefit income;
- Long term mental health disabilities leading to sanctions due to failure to comply with DWP conditionality.

3.18 There has been an increase in the number of applications received from April 2014 onwards. On average 30 applications are received each month compared with 22 per month for 2013/14. Majority of these are repeat application from the same individuals for support with day to day living costs, in most cases foodbank vouchers are awarded.

3.19 A breakdown of awards made for 2014/15 up to Qtr2 is as follows:

Item	Number awarded	Total expenditure	Average award
Cooker	6	£1,200	£200
Fridge	8	£998	£124.75
Microwave	1	£40	£40
Washing machine	2	£300	£150
Furniture package	10	£1,514	£151.40
Removal expenses	2	£220	£110
Clothing	3	£308	£126.67
Food	72	£804	£11.17
Fuel for cooking/heating	36	£920	£25.56
Fuel for vehicle	2	£70	£35
Laundry	2	£20	£10
Public transport	12	£212	£17.67
Toiletries	7	£116	£9.67
Daily living expenses	31	£1,418	£45.74
Total	194	£8,140	£41.96

3.20 There is an expectation that applications will increase during the winter months as more applications are anticipated for fuel for cooking and heating, given previous trends for 2013/14.

3.21 82 foodbank vouchers were awarded in 2013/14 and 58 have been awarded for 2014/15 QTR2. In some cases foodbank vouchers are not suitable i.e. Friday afternoon applications and food bank not open again until Monday so 72 awards of supermarket vouchers for food were made and detailed in the table above.

4.0 LOANS

4.1 Some awards are made as a loan to the applicant and therefore the applicant is required to pay back the sum awarded. I.e. the applicant is

due to receive their income shortly, but needs some money to see them through to the end of the week.

- The average amount of loans provided was £74.00;
- The total loan amount for 2013/14 was £1,245.00
- The maximum amount of a loan provided was £200.00;
- The Council did not charge interest on loans awarded in 2013/14;
- The average term of the loan is 26 weeks;
- All loans are reviewed and monitored monthly to ensure the loan is being cleared;
- As at 31.3.2014 there were 5 outstanding loans totalling £395.00.

5.0 ADVICE AND SIGNPOSTING

5.1 The Council signposted applicants to other sources and advice as appropriate such as:

- Rutland Citizens Advice Bureau i.e. budgeting advice, debt management;
- Department for Work and Pensions i.e. funeral expenses, faster payments;
- Leicester Charity Link i.e. for furniture and white goods;
- Clockwise Credit Union i.e. for low cost loans.

6.0 REFUSED APPLICATIONS AND APPEALS

6.1 67 applications were refused in 2013/14.

6.2 Applicants are required to reside in Rutland. Data is not held on how many applicants have been refused on the basis of being non-resident. However, a small number of awards have been given to non-residents i.e. people who have presented as homeless and were being supported by other council teams.

The most common reason for refusal is:

- A repeat application for the same circumstances and the applicant has not sought advice as referred;
- The applicant is able to pursue their claim for benefit with the Job Centre Plus and seek a faster payment;
- The application form is incomplete or insufficient information has been provided.

- 6.3 Applicants who are refused an award are signposted to other services for advice.
- 6.4 The Council's scheme has an appeal process detailed in the policy. 10 appeals were received in 2013/14; of those 9 were successfully awarded.

7.0 PUBLICITY OF THE SCHEME

- 7.1 The Council's scheme has been published on our website, leaflets are available at customer services, stakeholders and third sector agencies have been made aware of the scheme and how applications can be made. In the early days of the scheme JobCentre Plus staff distributed our leaflets and signposted Rutland residents to our scheme.
- 7.2 Applications can be made by completing a paper form which is available online, at the local CAB office or at the council offices.
- 7.3 Applications have been received by the following channels in 2013/14:

Channel	Number of applicants
CAB	33
Support Worker	17
RCC Social Worker	33
Direct to RCC	180

8.0 FEEDBACK

- 8.1 Rutland Citizens Advice Bureau has provided some feedback on the scheme:
- CAB have advised that generally they think the decisions made have been fair;
 - There is good partnership working between the Council and the bureau;
 - CAB are unsure that potential clients who could access the fund are aware of it and would welcome further advertisement.
- 8.2 The local scheme was presented to the parish forum with a view to seeking support and involvement in administering the scheme. Some parishes have identified local charities and trusts that Officers can refer applicants to and others have offered to help with transportation if this is a barrier to accessing the fund. A small number of referrals have been made but officers are not aware of the funds have been utilised.

9.0 NATIONAL OVERVIEW

9.1 Some schemes for 2014/15 are detailed in the table below:

Local Authority	Funding allocation	Spend to 31 Jan 2014	% of funding remaining to 31 Jan 2014
Rutland	£23,116	£10,742	54%
Leicester City Council	£1,606,000	£519,610	68%
Leicestershire County Council	£886,854	£359,854	59%
Northamptonshire County Council	£2,033,147	£875,000	57%

Information source: The Guardian.com FOI Data set 20 April 2014.

- 9.2 The analysis based on Freedom of Information requests by the Guardian and by the Centrepont charity, shows that 10 months into the first year of local welfare, the average spend by 139 councils was 43% of the available budget.
- 9.3 Some Councils have indicated that they will not adopt a scheme for 2015/16 onwards unless funding is made available. E.g. Leicestershire County Council is not providing financial support and are signposting to other services.
- 9.4 There were 3 complaints made to the Local Government Ombudsman regarding local welfare in 2013/14; 1 was not upheld and 2 were upheld, both upheld cases were resolved by the Council without the LGO involvement; the complaints focused on the criteria of the scheme and the length of time taken to resolve the application.

10.0 OPERATIONAL OVERVIEW

10.1 The scheme does not offer an 'out of hours' provision, this was previously provided by DWP for crisis loans. There have been no reported incidents during 2013/14 of requests for crisis support out of hours. Some applications have been submitted quite late in the day i.e. Friday afternoon at 4.10pm, however Officers have ensured that late claims have been administered promptly and awards made if appropriate.

10.2 The main impacts are as follows:

- Increase in workload for officers;
- Design of policy and monitoring of the fund;
- Design and production of application form, leaflets and publicity;
- Staff training and awareness, including updating the website;
- Amendment of software to make awards and record data;

- Completion of FOI requests;
- Engagement activities with parish and town councils and third party organisations;
- Notification of decision and appeal process and signposting to other services;
- Some applications are complex and require multiple enquiries such as; enquiries to DWP to verify their income, referral and follow up with their support worker, engagement with environmental health officers and social workers;
- Poor reaction upon refusal or not being awarded as much as requested, resulting in verbal abuse towards Officers.

10.3 It is estimated that each application for welfare crisis support takes on average 2.5 hours of officer time, this does vary per application depending upon whether the application is for immediate crisis support for food and fuel or for community care based applications which take much longer, the following activities are undertaken:

- Review of the evidence provided;
- Research and follow up enquiries for further information;
- Validation of medical conditions;
- Validation of income and expenditure i.e. contacting DWP;
- Contacting other professionals such as social workers, support workers, landlords, environmental health officer, CAB;
- Signposting to other services i.e. free school meals, debt advice, free energy survey to reduce fuel bills, social worker;
- Calling the customer to notify the award/refusal;
- Writing to customer and notification of outcome and appeal rights;
- Providing actual of award;
- Updating database and maintaining statistic data, management of funds and vouchers;
- Procurement of goods and services i.e. white goods, arrange delivery, connection of items i.e. cooker;
- Review by senior officer upon dispute or appeal.

10.4 Based on 2.5 hours per claim:
 $263 \text{ claims} \times 2.5 \text{ hours} = 657.5 \text{ hours p.a.} = 17.7 \text{ weeks of FTE post.}$

10.5 In summary, processing applications is time consuming, with officers spending time administering a number of repeat claims. In order to reduce administration time and to clarify the eligibility criteria, the following policy changes are proposed:

- Improve the application process;
- Provide clarity to applicants on how to apply;

- Provide clarity on the criteria so it is clear what can be awarded and what can't;
- Help individuals to help themselves by insisting they seek advice before making another claim;
- Avoid creating dependency on crisis awards by limiting their value and limiting the number of repeat applications;
- Ensure that awards are for genuine crisis and not just for 'nice to have' items.
- Ensure that the budget available is sufficient by limiting the value of awards and the number of repeat applications, given the increase in applications from 2013/14 to 2014/15 Qtr2.

11.0 OTHER SOURCES OF FINANCIAL SUPPORT WITHIN THE COUNCIL

11.1 A number of services offer financial support or equivalent to people in crisis, there may be some people who access these funds as well as the crisis fund, these are detailed below:

- Travel warrants – a voucher to help people get to their Jobcentre plus appointment administered by CAB;
- Section 17 funding - for children in need administered by Children's Services;
- Rent Deposit Scheme – financial help for homeless people administered by Housing Options team;
- Discretionary Housing Payments- additional support for people in receipt of Housing Benefit administered by the Revenues and Benefits team;
- Discretionary Local Council Tax Support – additional support for people in receipt of Local Council Tax Support administered by the Revenues and Benefits team.

12.0 CASE STUDIES

12.1 Case Study 1

Miss T, a single parent of 3 children made an application for money for food and fuel via CAB as her entitlement to Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) stopped. CAB has supported Miss T in making a new claim for ESA and providing supporting evidence to DWP. Miss T was awarded a food bank voucher, £30.00 voucher for fresh food and £30.00 cash for fuel. The DWP never received Miss T's 'fit note' which was posted by CAB and therefore had to make 5 further claims for crisis support until the DWP resolved her ESA claim. The ESA payment was backdated and Miss T re-paid the awards in full.

12.2 Case study 2

Mr J, a single, unemployed, homeless man, made a claim via his support worker for a furniture package having recently been given a tenancy for a flat. Officers made enquiries with DWP, Housing Options Team and his support worker to determine his income and the items required. Mr J was awarded a Melton Furniture Project Voucher for £200; a voucher to purchase a microwave from Wilkinson's for £40.00 and a small second- hand fridge was purchased and delivered for £50.00.

12.3 Case study 3

Mr A, a single, unemployed care leaver aged 20, made a claim for money to buy suitable clothing to attend an interview. A cash award was made of £30. Mr A attended the interview and was offered the job. Mr A started work and stopped claiming Job Seekers Allowance.

13.0 CONCLUSIONS

13.1 A number of conclusions can be made about the scheme based on the data and the operational activity:

- The Discretionary fund has been largely successful with a number of award being made;
- CAB support the scheme;
- The administration and management of the fund has resulted in additional workload for Officers with some cases being quite time consuming; the policy needs some revision to ensure administration is reduced and that the criteria are clear as detailed at point 10.5.
- Nationally schemes are underspent in 2013/14 and authorities are now considering their options from 2015/16 onwards, some authorities will not be continuing with providing financial support;

13.2 An Equality Impact Assessment will be undertaken to ensure that the scheme for 2015/16 does not disadvantage certain protected groups.

A large print version of this document is available on request



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