

REPORT TO: EXECUTIVE
Date of Meeting: 14.04.2015
Report of: Assistant Director Customer Access
Title: Local Welfare Support

Is this a Key Decision?

No

Is this an Executive or Council Function?

Executive

1. What is the report about?

To report on the first two years of operation of the Local Welfare Support Scheme and the plans for year 3.

2. Recommendations:

That Executive notes the contents of this report on plans for the third year of the Local Welfare Support scheme.

3. Reasons for the recommendation:

A third year of funding for Local Welfare Support has been agreed by Devon County Council. It is likely to be the last funding provided for this purpose.

4. What are the resource implications including non financial resources.

Administering the Local Welfare Support scheme requires extensive officer time. The grant from Devon County Council includes an amount towards these administration costs.

5. Section 151 Officer comments:

There are no additional financial implications for the City Council in the report.

6. What are the legal aspects?

The organisations in receipt of funding should be put on notice as a matter of priority that the funding streams will come to an end on 31 March 2016 and will not be renewed for the reasons set out in this report.

7. Monitoring Officer's comments:

In the absence of the Monitoring Officer, this report raises no issues for the Deputy Monitoring Officer.

8. Report details:

- 8.1 As part of the government's wider welfare reforms, elements of the Social Fund previously administered by The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) have been abolished. Since 1 April 2013 Exeter City Council has administered a scheme of Local Welfare Support via a funding agreement with Devon County Council.

- 8.2 The initial agreement lasted for two years in line with the funding from Department for Work and Pensions to Devon County Council. During the first two years of the scheme LWS in Exeter has made over 4000 awards of assistance to individuals at a total cost of £280,000. Additionally £180,000 has been spent on the Exeter Money Advice Partnership, a partnership between Exeter CAB and Homemaker SW providing debt and budgeting assistance to Exeter City Council customers.
- 8.3 In February 2015, Government announced that it had reconsidered its decision to end the additional funding from April 2015 and, with a top up from Devon County Council, a reduced fund is available for one more year. A new agreement has been reached between Devon County Council and the District authorities to last until 31 March 2016. The partnership agreement specifies that the Local Welfare Support scheme is intended to help achieve three strategic outcomes:
- Increase self reliance and resilience
 - Quick and effective support for those with high priority short term needs
 - Help for people to establish themselves in, or remain in, the community
- 8.4 The additional funding is for a single year with no expectation of further awards from 2016. The priorities for the scheme this year are therefore:
- To manage down demand for direct grant support
 - Build resilience in the organisations who can continue providing support after the end of LWS
 - Fund a money and budgeting advice service which can help residents to financial sustainability
 - Develop schemes in partnership with external organisations which can continue beyond the end of direct funding

9. How does the decision contribute to the Council's Corporate Plan?

Local Welfare Support has played a significant role supporting the "help me with my financial and housing problem" system achieve their purpose. It has provided crisis support to people with immediate financial problems and helped residents to become established and remain in their homes in the city. Continuing to operate the scheme in 2015 / 16 allows Exeter City Council to provide this support for another year.

10. What risks are there and how can they be reduced?

Funding is only provided for one year. There is a risk of individuals becoming reliant on the scheme as a long term solution to their deeper issues and organisations coming to rely on it as a replacement for reduced funding elsewhere. To help mitigate this, the focus through 2015 will be on reducing demand for crisis support and building capacity in other organisations.

11. What is the impact of the decision on equality and diversity; health and wellbeing; safeguarding children, young people and vulnerable adults; community safety and the environment?

The Local Welfare Support scheme provides support to the most vulnerable members of our community. Maintaining the scheme for another year will allow us to continue to assist these groups.

12. Are there any other options?

We do not have to enter the partnership agreement with Devon County Council and the other Devon district authorities. That would leave us with no funding for Local Welfare Support beyond April 2015.

We could use the funding provided solely for a crisis support scheme. This would allow that aspect of Local Welfare Support to continue beyond 2016 but would mean that there was no funding for money, budgeting and debt advice or to support credit union services.

Crisis support could be ended sooner and the money saved put into other schemes supporting the aims of Local Welfare Support. That would remove a versatile and useful tool for assisting small numbers of really hard to help customers.

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Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1972 (as amended)

Background papers used in compiling this report:-

None

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