

DRAFT LOCAL SUPPORT AND PREVENTION FUND POLICY

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1. Summary

- 1.1 The draft policy for the administration of Shropshire's local welfare provision, "The Local Support and Prevention Fund" (LSPF) was presented to Cabinet on 11 February 2015 with the recommendation that, following a period of consultation and any necessary amendments resulting, the policy be brought back to Cabinet for approval.
- 1.2 The Local Support and Prevention Fund represents the areas of the former Social Fund, previously administered by the Department for Work & Pensions that transferred to Local Authorities from April 2013. The main purpose of this funding is to help vulnerable people meet short-term needs when in crisis and to help vulnerable people remain in the community. Shropshire's approach of working holistically within a framework of other providers and of challenging expectation where appropriate has meant that the limited amount of funding available can be profiled over the next 4-5 years to coincide with major changes to the benefits system.
- 1.3 A small number of comments were received during the consultation period which included replies from Housing Association support workers and Voluntary and Community Sector workers, all responses broadly endorsed the purpose and administration of the fund and the comments received resulted in a clearer definition of the qualifying conditions and only minor wording changes elsewhere. A summary of the consultation replies is included in appendix C to this report.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Cabinet is requested to approve the revised draft policy.

REPORT

3. Risk Assessment and Opportunities Appraisal

- 3.1 The income and expenditure of all applicants to the Local Support and Prevention Fund is examined to determine their own ability to meet the stated need. We have identified that customers with disabilities may feel adversely impacted due to the inclusion of their disability income in this income and expenditure check. The purpose of LSPF awards is to alleviate hardship or crisis situations and for this reason when looking at the resources available to someone, the policy includes all of the income available to them including that awarded in recognition of increased costs as a result of disability. The inclusion of disability related income is, we feel, potentially mitigated by offsetting against it any additional expenditure that a person might have as a result of living with their disability. All decisions are discretionary and allow officers to look at all of the facts of a case and all decisions are underpinned by the requirement for fair and consistent decision making throughout. Because of the nature and purpose of LSPF awards we expect that there will be an overall positive impact across the nine protected characteristics groups and on social inclusion. An Equalities and Social Inclusion Impact Assessment is attached to this report at appendix B.

4. Financial Implications

- 4.1 The Government provided councils with limited funding to administer the Local Support and Prevention Fund for the period April 2013 to March 2015. Specific funding for Local Welfare Provision ceased from April 2015 onwards and whilst the LSPF allocation is not an official ring-fenced grant the approach in Shropshire has been to ring-fence the unspent money from 2013/14 and 2014/15 and to profile this to a forward period from 2015 to 2020. This coincides with the roll out of the Universal Credit and other major changes in welfare benefits system which will undoubtedly create demand. To alleviate the risk of the money being clawed back by the Department for Work & Pensions we communicated this approach to them and no objection has been raised by them in return.

5. Background

- 5.1 The Social Fund which was previously administered by the Department for Work & Pensions and incorporated both statutory Maternity and Funeral payments and an entirely discretionary system of grants and repayable loans. Within this were Crisis Loans which were a crisis provision intended to provide short-term help to avoid a risk to a person's health and safety and Community Care Grants to help establish the most vulnerable back into society or to prevent them from entering institutional care.
- 5.2 Local provision has taken over the administration of the Crisis Loan and Community Care Grants elements but has not attempted to replicate the

original scheme. Instead we have developed a more holistic locality based approach which is part of a larger framework of help including local providers such as food bank and furniture schemes, whose costs we then reimburse, as well as incorporating advice and support services that can address any underlying issues identified. No award made by Shropshire Council is repayable.

- 5.3 Incorporating appropriate challenge into the decision making process, referring to support services and working with local providers has combined to give best value for the taxpayer and put Shropshire in the position of being able to continue to offer this help long after the specific funding ceased. There is evidence however that some partner organisations remain uncomfortable with the concept of providing challenge to those that apply.

6. Conclusions:

- 6.1 The resulting policy before cabinet shows how the council administers the Local Support and Prevention Fund. It has been written as a transparent and comprehensive guide explaining the purpose of the fund and what it might pay for, how a claim is made and the considerations applied in the decision making process as well as how a person might challenge a decision if they disagree with the outcome so taking any applicant or person representing them through the requirements of the scheme.

<p>List of Background Papers (This MUST be completed for all reports, but does not include items containing exempt or confidential information)</p>
<p>Cabinet 11 February 2015: item 20 – Report to Cabinet, Draft LSPF Policy (Pages 1025-1062 of public reports pack)</p>
<p>Cabinet Member (Portfolio Holder) Portfolio Holder for Resources, Finance and Support Councillor M Owen</p>
<p>Local Member All</p>
<p>Appendices Appendix A – The Local Support and Prevention Fund (LSPF) Draft Policy Appendix B – ESIIA for the LSPF policy Appendix C – Summary of consultation replies</p>