

Equality Impact Assessment



Name of project/proposal

Local Welfare Assistance

Contact name

Dan Stoneman

Department

Corporate Services

Intended publication date

30 Jul 2014

Purpose for project/proposal

From April 2013 the Government began welfare reforms. Part of these reforms was the abolition of aspects of the Social Fund (Community Care Grants and Crisis Loans). Administration of these funds was based on a loans and cash exchange process. Reports indicate that users of the now abolished systems may not be those for whom the fund had been initially established.

The Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) however recognised there was still a need to develop some support alongside their welfare reforms as it was understood that there would continue to be people in need over and above the assistance these reforms would put in place.

The DWP reported that the old Social Fund systems were poorly targeted in the main due to remote processing, they saw applications outstrip capacity, individuals were repeatedly returning for support and that the sticking plaster approach to resolving crisis not supporting people to resolve crisis with dignity and independence that would leave them better placed to resolve future similar situations.

Hampshire County Council has been delivering LWA since April 2013. The aim of this support was to build on the Commission on Personalisation in 2008 by prioritising the development of the Universal Offer, delivering that little bit of help to ensure people within Hampshire can access assistance or are armed with the capability to resolve issues for themselves when they need to.

The approach developed back in 2013, set out that funding allocated for LWA would be used to provide and support a network of existing services and organisations to deliver practical responses to the difficulties people may face, such as providing information to enable people to manage difficult periods more effectively, mechanisms to provide access to goods and services and access to support to help people resolve on-going difficulties.

This approach has drawn on the wealth of activity already provided by the voluntary, community and statutory sectors in Hampshire, delivering added value whilst providing significant additional resources. The last year has been spent managing public expectations following the abolition of community care grants and crisis loans by the DWP and by reducing peoples dependency upon a non statutory discretionary based cash and goods awards system. Core elements of LWA have been commissioned for residents in crisis and work has been undertaken with key partners and stakeholders to mitigate the future impact of changes to funding by utilising and developing existing resources and services where reasonable.

It is clear that through this approach many situations that could have resulted in cash payments or goods under an awards based application process have been resolved through better information, advice, signposting and access to local support.

3 Options were explored in determining a direction for future delivery of LWA;

Option One would be to terminate LWA.

With no statutory duty to provide Local Welfare Assistance the scheme could be terminated with immediate effect. In the last 12 months Hampshire County Council's approach, that was designed to mitigate against the risk of creating a dependency on a discretionary funding system that was unlikely to remain indefinitely, has provided core cultural and infrastructure changes through community engagement that would remain regardless of funding. This could still be Hampshire's offer to support individuals and families in crisis.

Option Two would be to use the funding from 2014-15 and any underspend to deliver the same approach in year two and potentially a further year until the funding is spent. Demand is already increasing for discretionary support awarded through LWA. Figures collected in this first year indicate that public awareness is growing and local services and organisations are more willing to sign up to work with Hampshire's model of LWA. While there is the funding available to continue to deliver LWA to the same extent next year this would only serve to create greater dependency on a service that would not be likely to be able to maintain levels of activity from 2015-16 onwards.

The preferred option and therefore the recommendation that is being supported throughout this EIA is (Option 3) to align funding and future services with corporate work streams and deliver through strategic local partners to develop a sustainable local offer that reduces the risk placed upon LWA through recent funding decisions.

This EIA is concerned with the development of LWA into year two and beyond which looks to build upon the good start made to date and to reduce risks associated to individuals and families as well as the County Council in light of ministerial decisions relating to the future funding of LWA. These decisions will see no new money made available for this provision from 2015-16 from the Department for Work and Pensions.

Consultation

Has a consultation been carried out?

No

1. Clearly the amount of uncertainty and public speculation relating to the provision of Local Welfare Assistance, the use of funding in this area and the national lobbying to change ministers decisions is a cause of potential concern.
2. The proposal for the future delivery of Local Welfare Assistance in Hampshire could be scaled up or down depending on any change in decision regarding funding arrangements post 2014-15.
3. The risk to any LWA scheme is that funding is reduced over time and the service withers away. By stimulating and enabling sustainable activity it is possible that this funding could be the catalyst for longer term support and better identification of early intervention and prevention services that reduce people's likelihood of reaching crisis.
4. In initial consultations relating to the delivery of LWA in Hampshire, the work proposed for 2014-15 onwards represents the natural progression of this vision.

Statutory considerations

Impact

Age	Medium
Disability	High
Sexual orientation	Medium
Race	Medium
Religion and belief	Medium
Gender reassignment	Medium
Sex	Medium
Marriage and civil partnership	Medium
Pregnancy and maternity	Medium

Other policy considerations

Poverty	High
Rurality	High
Other factors	None
If other please describe	

Geographical impact

All Hampshire

Have you identified any medium or high impact?*

Yes

No

Equality statement

It is clear that Local Welfare Assistance impacts a wide cross-section of society and communities. It is likely that many individuals will face times of crisis and some will be more at risk than others. In particular those living in rural areas and areas of deprivation. In terms of specific groups, the elderly, disabled, low income families and anyone out of work or claiming benefits will be impacted by changes relating to LWA.

It is the intention of Hampshire's model to mitigate against the specific risks to health and wellbeing within these groups as far as possible.

With funding being withdrawn from 2015-16 and understanding that this is not a statutory provision, steps are being taken to utilise this funding to get best value. The work proposed focuses on sustainability and longer term investment that is better aligned to existing services and support to try and ensure more people receive support for their crisis or circumstances before these become too critical and disabling.

Potential Mitigating Actions

1. Link to existing statutory and non statutory support
2. Work with organisations and services who support these groups and communities to co-design future support and service delivery
3. Ensure greater communication relating to support available

4. Continue to work with organisations and services, over a longer period of time than the one years funding would suggest, to look at building real resilience from local services

Date to review actions

05 Dec 2014

Final decision date

Final decision date due
Decision to be made by

30 Jul 2014
Executive Member