

Appendix 3 - Equality impact assessment



Name of policy, service or decision: Local Welfare Assistance

Lead directorate: Corporate Resources (Dudley Council Plus)

1. Description – what is being assessed?

The Local Welfare Assistance scheme (LWA)

2. Lead officer on assessment: Sharon Whale

3. Head of service: Liz Ralph / Jackie Davies

4. Members of assessment team:

Sharon Whale – Policy manager

5. Date assessment began: January 2013

Background

6. *What are the aims and objectives or purposes of the policy or function/service?*

The Social Fund was introduced over two decades ago and is administered centrally by the Department for Work & Pensions (DWP). Over the years welfare delivery has changed significantly. Current remote administrative processes do not support the high levels of discretion needed to ensure that support is targeted at the most vulnerable. Changes announced by the government will see Community Care Award (CCA) and Crisis Loans (CL) for general living expenses – which are the most discretionary elements of the current scheme – being replaced by the new locally based assistance delivered by Local Authorities, this new scheme will come into force on the 1st April 2013.

The new LWA scheme needs to be designed to meet local needs and priorities. The Government funding is not ring-fenced, enabling LAs greater freedom to deliver and dovetail with existing services as they see fit according to local need.

The new LWA scheme is designed to provide emergency support for the most vulnerable customers who are in financial need. There will be 2 forms of awards under this scheme:

- Crisis Awards (CA) - these awards provide short term access to essential items; food, heating, lighting, clothing, white goods and furniture. Customers for crisis awards must be without sufficient resources to meet an urgent need that poses an immediate and substantial risk to their health and safety or that of their dependants.
- Community Care Awards (CCA) - these aim to help people remain in the community or move back into the community by providing a range of standard items such as beds, bedding, furniture or white goods.

Due to the reduced Government funding for the scheme, we will be unable to replicate the provisions currently in place by the DWP. We need to make sure we are achieving best value for money and helping as many people as possible. As such, a set of core eligibility criteria are being agreed to target spending and ensure needs are targeted, while fitting in with the council's wider commitments to sustainability, tackling inequality and minimising fraud.

We are considering a range of options for delivering the scheme including working with local voluntary sector as well as private sector or commercial organisations.

During 2013/14 the scheme will be continuously monitored to ensure transparency and consistency, and that the disadvantaged groups are being targeted; there will be regular monitoring of the applications, the decision making process and any subsequent awards under the scheme.

The government's EIA for localising the Social Fund was considered when determining Dudley's local scheme. <<http://www.dwp.gov.uk/docs/eia-social-fund-localisation-wr2011.pdf>>

7. Who is it intended to affect or benefit (the target population)?

Due to the very nature of LWA people who access the service are more likely to be classed as vulnerable or having particular protected characteristics.

LWA will potentially affect any Dudley resident but the expectation is that applications will be received from broadly the same customers as previously made claims to the DWP Social Fund.

To be considered for either a CCA or CA the council is developing core eligibility criteria which will be considered for each customer when they make a claim for either award.

8. What are the main issues relating to each protected characteristic?

Consider all three parts of the public sector equality duty:

- eliminating discrimination, harassment and victimisation,
- advancing equality of opportunity, and
- fostering good relations.

All protected characteristics

The council will consider making an award to customers who meet the eligibility criteria, and are not subject to any of the listed exemptions set out in the local policy.

The DWP data regarding Social Fund has been published on the DWP website. The DWP acknowledge that there are some data completeness and data quality issues associated with the information that has been made available. We do not know if there is a bias in the missing data which would impact on protected characteristics.

Due to the reduced funding for the scheme compared with the previous Social Fund arrangements, all protected characteristics may be affected This, however will not disadvantage one particular group over another.

All customers will qualify for awards based on the criteria set out in the local policy

Age

DWP data suggests that

- Over 60% of CA and just fewer than 50% of CCA awards are made to people under the age of 35.
This group is more likely to have lower incomes and limited savings. National evidence shows that younger people are less likely to find employment in the current financial climate. The amount of some welfare benefits are reduced due to age, so weekly income for these groups would be lower
- Very few claims are received from people over the age of 55.
This group is more likely to have recourse to some other funds / support i.e. savings, other external agencies
DWP evidence suggests that some older people are reluctant to seek benefits or financial support until they are in extreme hardship, but localising the scheme may encourage older people to access these funds

Disability	<p>DWP data suggests that fewer than 20% of CAs and 30% of CCAs will be made to people who are disabled. Depending on disability some of these customers are more likely to be unemployed. Additional costs relating to disability mean some people rely heavily on benefits. Some disabled people may be more adversely affected by welfare reform in general. Parents of disabled children are less likely to be in employment. People with mental health problems or learning disability may have difficulty in coping with or understanding a new system.</p> <p>Access to the service maybe difficult due to communication (e.g. visual, hearing, learning disability) or mobility problems.</p>
Sex	<p>DWP data suggests that</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 10% of CA will be from couples, 30% from females and 60% from males. • 20% of CCA will be from couples, 45% from females and 35% from males. <p>Statistically parents in single parent households are more likely to be female and some single parent households are likely to be less well off. DWP data suggests that 15% of CA awards and 30% of CCA will be made to lone parents.</p>
Pregnancy or maternity	<p>There is no case data for this category available from the DWP as pregnancy was not identified as a qualifying vulnerability for claiming these awards. New single mothers may be more likely to find themselves in an emergency situation requiring support to set up accommodation.</p>
Race	<p>People from some ethnic groups may be less likely to seek assistance from the Social Fund scheme, due to lack of awareness.or cultural issues (<i>any evidence?</i>). Some ethnic groups are likely to be more highly represented in those eligible for awards due to higher rates of unemployment, mental health issues, numbers of ex-offenders etc. However, there is no case data or background research for this category available from the DWP, and race was not identified as a qualifying vulnerability for claiming these awards</p> <p>Individuals whose first language is not English may be unaware of the scheme or have difficulty in accessing it.</p> <p>Some potential customers e.g. migrant workers or the traveller community may be disadvantaged through not being permanently resident in the borough</p>
Gender reassignment	<p>There is no case data for this category available from the DWP as gender reassignment was not identified as a qualifying vulnerability for claiming these awards.</p>
Religion or belief	<p>There is no case data for this category available from the DWP but religion was not identified as a qualifying vulnerability for claiming these awards.</p>
Sexual Orientation	<p>There is no case data for this category available from the DWP but there is a risk that assumed or real, prejudices will prevent applications from people with different sexual orientations if support provided by faith based agencies.</p>

Stage 1 – evidence gathering

Provide details of all information about the policy, service or decision which will help the assessment. Use the headings below as reminders of what may be useful; this is not an exhaustive list.

Equality monitoring data:

The government's statistical data is available.

<<http://www.dwp.gov.uk/local-authority-staff/social-fund-reform/>>

Engagement and customer feedback:

Due to the timescales involved we have been unable to go out to formal consultation for year 1 but we have sought views from:

- Third sector including St Thomas Community Network, Black Country Foodbank, Interfaith Network, CAB, Dudley CVS, Dudley Community Partnership,
- Relevant Cabinet Members
- Other directorates

The Local Welfare Assistance scheme is being shaped by the outcomes of these discussions, including the development of the core criteria, any exclusions, and the delivery process and developing the referral pathways.

Ongoing dialogue will continue with stakeholders / support services during 2013/14 to ensure the processes are working and awards are being received by customers with protected characteristics.

Barriers to access:

Localising the scheme should reduce some of the barriers to access e.g. either through direct applications or referral from third sector advice organisations.

Information about the borough e.g. Census data:

Borough data is available which can provide the basis of comparisons between the level of applicants from different groups and the background population.

Background or comparative information:

The government's have statistical data available.

<<http://www.dwp.gov.uk/local-authority-staff/social-fund-reform/>>

What evidence is missing? What will be done to collect it?

The DWP acknowledge that there are some data completeness and data quality issues associated with this data that has been made available. We do not know if there is a bias in the missing data which would impact on protected characteristics.

It should be noted that our criteria is different to the Department for Work & Pensions so our customer profiles may well change.

During 2013/14 the scheme will be continuously monitored to ensure transparency and consistency, and that the disadvantaged groups identified are being targeted; there will be regular monitoring of the applications, the decision making process and any subsequent awards under the scheme.

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Stage 2 – data analysis

Provide details of the analysis completed on the information presented at stage 1 above, identify patterns or trends and compare with other authorities, national research, census data, etc.

The government's statistical data is available at:

<<http://www.dwp.gov.uk/local-authority-staff/social-fund-reform/>>

Stage 3 - assess the impact

Does the policy or function/service have any potential adverse impacts on particular protected groups? If so explain what they are.

The criteria set out in the policy will not result in any protected groups being disproportionately affected. Each claim will be dealt with on an individual basis, it will be the nature of the crisis / difficulty and whether not making the CA would result in a substantial risk to health and safety or not making the CCA would result in the person not being able to remain or become integrated into the community which will determine the award. However all previously eligible groups may be affected because of the reduction in government funding from the national to local scheme.

Stage 4 - reasons for adverse impacts

Outline the reasons identified for adverse impacts

Reduction in government funding from the national to local scheme

Stage 5 - consider alternatives/mitigating actions

How will any adverse impacts identified be reduced or removed? Explain if it is decided that an adverse impact is unavoidable.

Due to the reduction in funding an overall adverse impact is unavoidable but we are seeking to ensure that people with a real need from across protected groups are able to access the awards.

A partial award may be made owing to the fact that not all of the requested items or services will directly reduce the health and safety risks associated with the customers circumstances.

Given that the schemes will develop and may have some adverse impact on particular groups in future years the following process will be followed:-

Any changes to the scheme will be identified and will be assessed taking into account the impact it will have on specific protected characteristics. Changes to the policy will then be developed, appropriate consultation will be conducted, feedback will be considered and a revised policy will be approved and implemented. If any group is adversely affected then how to mitigate that impact will be considered.

The Council cannot guarantee an award. Not all qualifying applications may be paid as this scheme has a cash limited budget. A decision will take account of monthly budget positions and demand patterns. We will provide advice and assistance to applicants regarding alternative sources of information, advice and guidance, to ensure people in crisis or in need of community care can get access to support that will safeguard against risks to their health and safety.

In some circumstances we will, as a condition of an award, undertake an assessment of their immediate and additional households needs to identify other relevant sources of support.

Stage 6 - test the changes

Detail how the mitigating actions to reduce or remove the adverse impacts were tested, piloted or consulted on and the results of this.

See above.

During 2013/14 the scheme will be continuously monitored to ensure transparency and consistency, and that the disadvantaged groups identified are being targeted; there will be regular monitoring of the applications, the decision making process and any subsequent awards under the scheme.

Stage 7 – decision making

Did the test, pilot or further consultation illustrate that the mitigating actions will be effective? What decision is recommended about the policy or service and why?

How will the decision maker be briefed on the EIA?

During 2013/14 the scheme will be continuously monitored to ensure transparency and consistency, and that the disadvantaged groups identified are being targeted; there will be regular monitoring of the applications, the decision making process and any subsequent awards under the scheme.

The Local Welfare Assistance scheme, including the EIA will be considered by members and cabinet.

Stage 8 - monitoring arrangements

How will the equality impact of the policy or service be monitored in the future?

During 2013/14 the scheme will be continuously monitored to ensure transparency and consistency, and that the disadvantaged groups identified are being targeted; there will be regular monitoring of the applications, the decision making process and any subsequent awards under the scheme.

Stage 9 – action planning

The scheme will be publicised over the coming months by DWP and the Council to ensure that customers are aware of the new Local Welfare Assistance scheme.

Training and awareness raising will be provided to staff and service users on the new scheme.

Appropriate methods of delivery will be developed

Core criteria and eligibility will be tested over the coming months

The scheme will be monitored to ensure the referral mechanisms work well, both to the scheme and for the ineligible / unsuccessful customers to potential alternative support.

Provide details of actions or improvements identified during the EIA.

Date completed: 7th January 2013

Signed by assessment lead officer: Sharon Whale

Signed by assistant director/ head of service: Mike Williams

Date: 24th January 2012