


## REPORT TO EMERGENCY COMMITTEE

18 August 2020

<b>Subject:</b>	<b>Emergency Assistance Grant (Defra)</b>
<b>Director:</b>	Acting S151 Officer Rebecca Maher
<b>Contribution towards Vision 2030:</b>	
<b>Contact Officer(s):</b>	Charlie Davey Business Partner – Finance <a href="mailto:Charles_davey@sandwell.gov.uk">Charles_davey@sandwell.gov.uk</a>

### DECISION RECOMMENDATIONS

That the committee:

- approves the allocation of the Defra Emergency Assistance Grant to the following activities:

	£
SMBC Operated Food Hub	40,200
Replacement for Food Hub	50,000
Fareshare	6,000
Local Welfare Provision	188,000
Food Pantry Development	60,000
Brushstrokes	39,000
Local Food Banks	30,000
Welfare Rights Team	42,200
<b>Total</b>	<b>455,400</b>

2. agrees to the use of delegated powers by the Acting S151 Officer and the Executive Director of Neighbourhoods to allocate the remaining balance of the grant (£65,130).

## 1 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 This report seeks approval of the proposed use of the Defra Emergency Assistance Grant.

## 2 IMPLICATIONS FOR VISION 2030

2.1 This proposal meets the objectives of Ambition 2 - Sandwell is a place where we live healthy lives and live them for longer, and where those of us who are vulnerable feel respected and cared for.

## 3 BACKGROUND AND MAIN CONSIDERATIONS

3.1 On 18 March 2020 the Emergency Committee authorised the S151 Officer to bid for and receive grant funding that would assist the council in responding to coronavirus.

3.2 On 10 July 2020 the authority was notified by the Department for Environment Food & Rural Affairs (Defra) that it has been awarded a one-off grant of **£520,530** to help the authority support those struggling to afford food and other essentials over the coming months due to Covid-19. We confirmed acceptance of the grant on 14 July 2020.

3.3 Key extracts from the grant guidance are:

- Use discretion on how to identify and support those most in need.
- Use the funding from July onwards to support those struggling to afford food and essentials.
- Use the funding for existing schemes and other support which deliver the same outcomes.
- Consider advising and providing information to people to help them access longer term support they might need, such as benefits
- You should keep administrative costs to a minimum.
- Defra monitoring will depend upon the funding received; a short survey will be released at the end of October and if you received between £0.25m & £1m you may be randomly selected to provide a representative sample.
- The government expects that most of the funding will be spent within 12 weeks.

## **4 THE CURRENT POSITION**

- 4.1 The council undertakes activity which supports the grant objectives and it is proposed that the grant is used to fund these services and to support expansion within the voluntary sector to deliver the required outcomes.
- 4.2 The current proposals utilise approximately 90% of the available funding and further proposals will be developed to use the remaining balance.
- 4.3 An overview of the council's Local Welfare Provision (LWP) is attached in Appendix 1 and further details of the voluntary sector proposals are included in Appendix 2.

## **5 CONSULTATION (CUSTOMERS AND OTHER STAKEHOLDERS)**

- 5.1 Various teams across the council, particularly those that support the community and voluntary sectors have been consulted in the formulation of these proposals.

## **6 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS**

- 6.1 Alternative options for using the grant could be developed however, Defra have indicated that they will undertake monitoring of the grant use during October.

## **7 STRATEGIC RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1 The council has been allocated a one-off grant of £520,530 in 2020/21 by Defra and this will fully fund all proposals within the report.

## **8 LEGAL AND GOVERNANCE CONSIDERATIONS**

- 8.1 The grant will be paid to local authorities under section 31 of the Local Government Act 2003.

## **9 EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

- 9.1 There is no requirement to conduct an Equality Impact Assessment.

## **10 DATA PROTECTION IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

- 10.1 Any information used to compile this report is subject to information governance legislation and is managed in accordance with the Council's policies and protocols. A Data Protection Impact Assessment is not required.

## **11 CRIME AND DISORDER AND RISK ASSESSMENT**

11.1 There no requirement to carry out a Crime and Disorder and Risk Assessment.

## **12 SUSTAINABILITY OF PROPOSALS**

12.1 The use of the grant to support the Local Welfare Provision increases the sustainability of this service and its ability to respond to additional demand.

## **13 HEALTH AND WELLBEING IMPLICATIONS (INCLUDING SOCIAL VALUE)**

13.1 The allocation of this funding will assist in supporting the health and wellbeing of the most vulnerable members of the Sandwell community during the COVID-19 pandemic.

## **14 IMPACT ON ANY COUNCIL MANAGED PROPERTY OR LAND**

14.1 There is no direct impact on and land or assets.

## **15 CONCLUSIONS AND SUMMARY OF REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS**

15.1 The proposed allocations support the delivery of the grant objectives in a way which minimises the administrative costs and meets the requirement to demonstrate a timely response to the grant offer.

## **16 BACKGROUND PAPERS**

16.1 Defra Emergency Grant Guidance.

## **17 APPENDICES:**

Appendix 1 - SMBC Local Welfare Provision Policy  
Appendix 2 - Further Information on Proposals

**Rebecca Maher**  
**Head of Finance/Acting S151 Officer**

## Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council Local Welfare Provision (LWP) Policy

2019/20

### Meeting Ambition 10



## POLICY STATEMENT

The Local Welfare Provision (LWP) scheme will seek to assist vulnerable people in meeting their needs for subsistence or financial support where they are unable to meet their immediate short term needs or where they require assistance to maintain their independence within the community. This will be aligned to the Council's key principles of tackling inequality and reducing poverty.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Local Welfare Provision

LWP will enable the Local Authority to provide assistance / support to vulnerable people in hardship situations. The overall intention is to use LWP to complement the existing support that the Council and its partners give to residents.

The LWP will compliment the Council Welfare Assistance Framework. The Council has adopted a framework approach to make the most effective use of the existing resources it deploys, aligning existing provision in homelessness prevention, children's services and vulnerable older people. In this way, the

Council will be stretching and maximising the use of all welfare assistance resources.

The Framework aims to coordinate the use of welfare assistance resources behind the scenes and provide seamless support to the customer.

When making a decision on assistance, consideration will be given to the following priorities:

- To support vulnerable young people in the transition to adult life
- Safeguard Sandwell residents in their homes
- Help those who are trying to help themselves
- Keep families together
- Help provide stability to children
- Support the vulnerable in the local community
- Prevent homelessness for those at risk of losing their home
- Help customers through personal crisis and difficult events
- Support people affected by domestic violence

## 2. GENERAL PRINCIPLES

### 2.2 Considerations for an award

- The scheme is purely discretionary; a resident does not have a statutory right to an award
- The process will be based on referrals and awards and will be dependent upon a needs and eligibility based assessment, rather than an external application process
- Awards will be made by way of pre paid cards or goods. Generally no cash awards will be made

### 2.1 The LWP will consist of 3 key aspects of support:

#### Planned Support

Intended to help vulnerable people over the age of 18 (young adults aged between 16 and 18 may also be considered where they are unable to receive assistance through Section 17), live as independent a life as possible in the community. This form of support can be considered where the applicant is in receipt of benefit and is moving into independent living.

Planned support is also available to people if they are leaving accommodation in which they received significant and substantial care and supervision and they expect to be discharged within 6 weeks. Examples of such accommodation:

- hospital or other medical establishment
- care home
- hostel
- staff intensive sheltered housing
- local authority care
- Prison or detention centre

Unless there are exceptional circumstances such as someone who lives at home and receives support from their family or family members are unable to assist due to the demands of their own financial, health or general circumstances, applications from single people living with other family members will not be awarded as they are likely to have access to assistance from other family members.

### Responsive Support

To meet a need that cannot be met from another source that has arisen as a consequence of a disaster and is the only way of preventing or mitigating serious risk to health or safety to the claimant or a member of their immediate family.

### Emergency Support

Individuals may receive support in an urgent situation/ need that presents a significant risk to themselves, their immediate family or dependant which can not be met by another source.

An urgent situation refers to one that gives rise to a need as a consequence of an emergency, disaster, exceptional circumstances or a pressing need that is strikingly different from the pressures generally associated with managing a low income.

## **2.2 Forms of Support**

- Planned / responsive support will be the direct provision of furniture and goods subject to meeting the eligibility criteria and the need assessment.

The following items may be provided are:

- Second hand furniture
- White goods
- Emergency Support will be provided :
  - Food Bank Vouchers
  - Pre-payment cards for fuel and travel

## **3. PROCESS FOR SERVICES**

### **3.1 Eligibility**

Consideration will be given when the person or family has a reasonable need for an item or items to support or sustain independent living, subject to the availability of the items and the budget has sufficient resources to meet the need.

In cases where DWP or other Government departments have a primary responsibility to residents, The Local Authority will first advocate for residents to secure entitlements.

Individuals may receive support if they are age 18 and over and in receipt of:

- Income Support

- Income based Jobseekers Allowance; or
- Income related Employment and Support Allowance
- Pension Credit Guaranteed
- Contribution based Job Seekers Allowance\*
- Contribution based Employment and Support Allowance\*
- Universal Credit (means tested maximum award rate/where the award does not include an earnings disregard)

*\*Claims will only be considered under these circumstances where the claimant and/or their partner has no dependants*

### **3.2 Exclusions**

Local Welfare Provision will not be awarded for any items that a government department or Council service has a statutory responsibility to provide.

The following people are excluded for support in all circumstances:

- Prisoners and people lawfully detained, including those released on temporary licence (but not those released on parole or on bail pending a court hearing)
- Members of a religious order who are fully maintained by the order

The following people are excluded from support except in very limited circumstances:

- Full-time students can only receive support for expenses arising out of a disaster.
- Someone who is a 'person from abroad' (i.e. who fails or would fail the habitual residence test for the purpose of Income Support, Pension Credit, Income-based Job Seekers Allowance or Income Related Employment Support Allowance) they can only receive support for expenses arising out of a disaster.
- Customers who are subject to the Benefit Cap. As it deemed that they have an income in excess of more than £20K.

### **3.3 Benefit Sanctions**

People subject to certain disallowances or sanctions to their Job Seekers Allowance, Employment Support Allowance, Income Support, Pension Credit or Universal Credit or equivalent welfare benefits will not normally be eligible for support.

However because of the nature of benefit sanctions each case will be considered on its own merits and where it is clear that failing to provide support would present significant risk to the claimant or, their immediate family or dependant which cannot be met by another source then support may be provided.



### **3.4 Universal Credit – Waiting period**

People who have made a claim for Universal Credit (UC) and are waiting for their first payment will not normally be eligible for support through LWP. However because of the actual time taken for the first payment of UC to be made there may be circumstances where support through LWP is required. Each request will be considered on its own merits and where it is clear that support cannot be obtained from any other source (such as payments in advance from the Department for Work and Pensions, savings or lieu of notice pay) and failing to provide support would present significant risk to the claimant or their immediate family, support through LWP will be considered.

### **3.5 How to request Support**

Referrals can be made via the Local Authority Local Offices. Sufficient information will be submitted to the LWP Central Unit to enable an assessment of eligibility and need.

### **3.6 Decision making process**

Decision making for any request for support will be processed and resources coordinated via a central coordinating function that sits within the Revenue and Benefits service area.

- Once all relevant data has been collected and the eligibility been satisfied the central function officer will contact the resident with a decision. If successful, awards will be provided in line with the resident's needs
- The Council will contact both successful and unsuccessful residents with the reasons for the decision and details of the appeals process and any other options available i.e. advice and information on other services and support available.
- If the information is incomplete or further supporting evidence is required, the team will call relevant services or the resident for the necessary information. Once all relevant data has been collected the central unit officer will contact the resident with a decision. If successful, awards will be provided in line with the applicants needs.
- Local Authority may request any reasonable evidence in support of an application. Such requests may be requested by phone/in person or in writing.
- Sandwell Council reserves the right to verify any information or evidence provided by the resident in appropriate circumstances.
- If the resident is unable to or does not provide the required evidence, Sandwell Council will still consider the request and will take into account any other available information.

### **3.7 Value of Awards**

Each case will be assessed on individual circumstances. The value of the items provided will be at the discretion of the Local Authority but will be based on standard prices for items including the cost of delivery and installation where appropriate.

Awards will be limited to 2 per 12 month period.

### **3.8 Capital Limits**

In order to retain consistency in the approach taken in the administration of Local Welfare Provision, there will not be a capital limit for awards made.

### **3.9 Outcome**

Once all information to support a request has been received, support will be processed within 14 working days.

The LWP Central Unit will provide written notification of an award of support to the individual, the Officer representing the individual and the supplier of goods. Written notification will include details of:

- The support to be provided
- How, when and where the award can be accessed

To avoid unnecessary delay, residents may be asked for alternative contacts methods such as email or telephone to speed up the outcome confirmation.

### **3.10 Out of Hours Arrangements**

Local Welfare Provision will not operate outside of normal office hours. Members of the community requiring assistance will be able to contact the Council through the existing out of hours services in Adult's and Children's Services.

### **3.11 Review / Reconsideration**

A resident can ask for reconsideration if they can demonstrate there has been a factual error based on the decision made, an oversight on a significant piece of evidence or where new evidence has come to light, that was not provided with the original request form. In either circumstance, the resident must provide the relevant details.

Such requests must be made in writing to the Revenue and Benefits Service.

This review will be carried out by the Revenues and Benefits Service Appeals team. Their decision will be final with no other right of appeal.

### **3.12 Monitoring Arrangements and managing welfare assistance resources**

The central coordinating function sitting with the Revenue and Benefits service area will monitor the number and amount of awards in relation to planned, responsive and emergency support on a monthly basis.

The central function will also monitor the award of other identified welfare assistance resources in order to allow the best possible use of all resources and to minimise potential for duplication or fraud.

The central function will also monitor cases where a request has been refused to ensure decisions are being made fairly and consistently and in line with the Council's equality duties.

#### **4. POLICY REVIEW**

The policy will be reviewed annually, or sooner if appropriate, to take account of operational adjustments and or changes to legislation.

#### **5. EQUALITIES**

Sector Equality Duty provided by the Equality Act 2010. No adverse impact on any protected characteristic has been identified as a result of this policy.

Emergency Assistance Grant Proposals July 2020

**Food Pantry Development**

A food pantry is a community food club, run by and for its members. People pay to join and can buy a range of food at minimal cost. Food pantries help people before they reach crisis point, offering them the support of a reliable and good quality food resource, as well as help with budgeting and links to other services. [Your Local Pantry](#) exists to help people who are struggling financially to make their money go further. There are some light-touch criteria for membership, and prospective members need to be residents of the area in which their pantry is based

There are 2 local pantries in Sandwell (Smethwick and Manna House in Blackheath, Rowley Regis), with a third due to open in September at the Brasshouse Centre, Smethwick.

**Proposal**

To establish up to 6 new pantries in Sandwell in the next 12 months.

Approx cost up to **£10,000 per pantry** (depending on the refurbishment required to set up a shop)

**Outcome:** Access to low cost food for up to 250 members per pantry

**Request: up to £60,000**

**Brushstrokes support for residents who have no recourse to public funds (NRPF)**

Throughout lockdown Brushstrokes have continued to provide food and other support to new comers, including those with NRPF.

Those who are able to visit Brushstrokes collect food and receive advice and support. In addition, a team of volunteers have been delivering food on a weekly basis. On average they have been feeding 320 -360 people a week, of which about 150 are children.

Those in receipt of food must engage with Brushstrokes to get help and advice.eg Settled Status

**Proposal:**

To enable Brushstrokes to deliver intensive support to NRPF, alongside the provision of food.

**Outcome:** joined up support to a very vulnerable group of people, increase in referrals from the council and the Childrens Trust, longer term decrease in council spending.

**Request:**

£33,000 salary of full time post

£6,000 to purchase food and other essential items – approx. 3 months of funding

**£39,000**

## LWP top up funding for food banks

The food banks have seen a steep increase in demand:

April/ May 2019				April/May 2020				Comparison - parcels	Comparison – number supported
Number of parcels	Number of adults supported	Number of children supported	Total number supported	Number of parcels	Number of adults supported	Number of children supported	Total number supported		
<b>Breaking Bread Wednesbury</b>									
81	114	82	196	217	330	260	590	+168% (x2.7)	+201% (x3)
<b>West Bromwich</b>									
375	610	236	846	385	510	400	910	+2%	+7.5%
<b>Smethwick</b>									
307	417	241	658	1013	1798	1217	3015	+230%	+358% (x4.5)

There is an allocation of £32,000 in the LWP for grants for food banks to enable them to purchase food. To date £22,000 has been awarded to Smethwick and to West Bromwich. In addition, in the last 3 months the Tipton Food Hub has purchased food in bulk and has given this to the food banks to supplement gaps in their donations whilst they were finding it very difficult to purchase food in bulk.

### **Proposal:**

To increase the budget for grants to food banks for the purchase of food and other essential items.

**Outcome:** improved capacity in food banks to cope with increases in demand over coming months.

### **Request:**

**Up to £30,000**