

MAYOR & CABINET			
REPORT TITLE	Local Support Scheme Update		
KEY DECISION	Yes	ITEM No.	
WARD	All		
CONTRIBUTORS	Executive Director for Customer Services		
CLASS	Part 1	Date	25 March 2015

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1. As part of the wider changes introduced by the Welfare Reform Act, the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) abolished the discretionary elements of the national Social Fund scheme (Crisis Loans and Community Care Grants) on 31 March 2013. These elements were replaced by locally-based emergency welfare assistance schemes (delivered by authorities, but funded by the DWP via a non-ringfenced grant). Lewisham's replacement scheme (known as the Local Support Scheme) was approved by Mayor & Cabinet in February 2013 and implemented on 1 April 2013. It was designed to administer emergency welfare assistance in a way that was easy and equitable to access, but also improved administrative efficiency and targeted limited funds at those most in need.
- 1.2. A review of the scheme has been undertaken to assess its effectiveness, focusing on demand, spend and the demographic profile of applicants. The outcomes of the review are summarised in this report, but the key finding was that demand was significantly lower than expected, with a consequent impact on the level of spend. Although the reasons for this reduction are not fully known, the report identifies several factors that are likely to have had an impact, such as the design of the scheme, the approach taken in awarding loans and the partnership with Lewisham Plus Credit Union (LPCU).
- 1.3. In addition, the report outlines the current and future funding position for the scheme, including the underspend from 2013/14 and anticipated underspend from 2014/15. As a result of the DWP's decision to withdraw funding from 2015/16 onwards, this underspend will be used to fund the future delivery of the Local Support Scheme. Work has been undertaken with the London Borough of Lambeth to develop proposals for a shared service (to be delivered in two phases) which will enable the Council to continue providing support to its most vulnerable residents for a further three or four years whilst ensuring that the remaining funds are used in the most efficient way. Several changes to the existing Local Support Scheme policy will be required to establish the first phase of the shared service, primarily focused around decision-making processes.

2. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

2.1. The purpose of this report is:

- To provide an update on the delivery of Lewisham's Local Support Scheme
- To outline the current funding position and proposals for future delivery arrangements
- To recommend changes to the policy and approach that will ensure the scheme better supports those residents who are most in need

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1. It is recommended that the Mayor agrees:

- To note the update on the delivery of the Local Support Scheme and the financial implications
- To note proposals to pilot a shared service approach for the scheme from April 2015 and delegate authority to the Executive Director for Customer Services to proceed with further phases of work (as set out in section 9)
- To approve the proposed changes to the policy set out in section 10 and delegate authority to the Executive Director for Customer Services to make minor amendments to ensure that the scheme can respond quickly to emerging needs

4. POLICY CONTEXT

4.1. The Welfare Reform Act, which received royal assent in March 2012, represented the biggest change to the welfare state in 60 years. Its key objectives were to improve fairness, equity and affordability in the benefits systems and design it in a way that actively supports employment.

4.2. As part of this Act, the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) abolished the discretionary elements of the national Social Fund scheme (Crisis Loans and Community Care Grants) on 31 March 2013. These elements were replaced by a combination of locally-based emergency welfare assistance schemes (delivered by authorities, but funded by the DWP via a non-ringfenced grant) and a nationally-administered Advance of Benefit facility, which will eventually replace Alignment Crisis Loans.

4.3. The delivery of Lewisham's emergency welfare assistance scheme (known as the Local Support Scheme) is aligned with several of the Council's key strategic priorities:

- **Ambitious & Achieving.** Where people are inspired and supported to fulfil their potential, including encouraging and facilitating access to education, training and employment opportunities for all our citizens (Sustainable Communities Strategy, Shaping Our Future: 2008-2020)

- **Inspiring Efficiency, Effectiveness & Equality.** Ensuring efficiency, effectiveness and equity in the delivery of excellent services to meet the needs of the community (Corporate Strategy, 2008-2011)

5. INTRODUCTION

- 5.1. DWP transferred responsibility for what was known as the Social Fund to local authorities on the 1 April 2013. The Council developed its own Local Support Scheme which was approved by Mayor & Cabinet in February 2013 and implemented on 1 April 2013. Due to limited and incomplete information from the DWP, it was difficult for officers to accurately predict customer need or spend levels with any degree of confidence. Lewisham's scheme was therefore designed in a way that was easy and equitable to access, but also aimed to improve administrative efficiency, target limited funds at those most in need and ensure its sustainability for future years.
- 5.2. A review of the scheme has been undertaken to assess its effectiveness and determine whether any changes are required in order to widen its accessibility and better support those residents most in need. The outcome of the review forms the basis of this report, alongside an update on the funding position and recommendations for future delivery arrangements.

6. LOCAL SUPPORT SCHEME

- 6.1. The key principles of Lewisham's Local Support Scheme are outlined below:

Emergency Loans (replacement Crisis Loans)

- 6.2. A repayable sum which is intended to provide immediate, short-term financial support for people who need money urgently as a result of a crisis situation, disaster or other emergency (either payments for specific items or living expenses to cover costs incurred).
- 6.3. Loans are also used to provide Rent in Advance payments that support single people who have been discharged from long-term institutional care or need to find a home as part of a planned resettlement/rehabilitation programme move into private-rented sector accommodation within the borough (applicants need to fulfil the criteria for Support Grants and have their needs assessed by the Council's Single Homeless Intervention & Prevention service).
- 6.4. All applicants must meet the eligibility criteria outlined in the policy, including being in receipt of a qualifying (i.e. income-related) benefit, having resided in the borough for a minimum of six weeks prior to making their application and not having any savings, capital and/or insurance that could meet the need for which they have made their application. In addition, they must not be eligible for financial assistance from the DWP (such as a Budgeting Loan or Advance of Benefit facility).

- 6.5. Applicants cannot receive another loan unless they have repaid any previous loans in full or can demonstrate that they are actively and consistently repaying their current loan.

Support Grants (replacement Community Care Grants)

- 6.6. A non-repayable grant awarded to provide assistance in the most serious situations where no other source of funding is available, such as expenses that will re-establish someone in the community or help them remain in the community, ease exceptional pressures on a family or help someone care for a prisoner/young offender on temporary release.
- 6.7. Applicants will need to meet the same eligibility criteria as for Emergency Loans, although those who are about to be in receipt of qualifying benefits or are about to be resettled into accommodation within Lewisham or another local authority by LB Lewisham's Housing Options team as part of a planned programme of resettlement/discharge of housing duty can also make an application.
- 6.8. Applicants can only apply for one Support Grant per year (with a maximum value of £1,000).

Application & Assessment

- 6.9. Applications for loans and grants are made via the Council website, using an online application, assessment and case management solution provided by IEG4. Customers who are unable to make online applications without support can either seek assistance from third party organisations/family/friends to complete the application on their behalf or make their application by telephone.
- 6.10. All applications are assessed by a team within the Housing Benefit service against the criteria set out in the policy. They also determine the value of the grant or loan to be provided to successful applicants (for loans, the value of an award for specific items is based on the average high street price and the value of an award for living expenses is based on the 2011/12 DWP Crisis Loan rates whilst for grants, the circumstances presented by the applicant will determine the amount awarded, based on a number of pre-set resettlement packages). If the assessor decides that a Budgeting Loan or a Short-Term Benefit Advance payment would be more appropriate, the applicant is referred back to the DWP.
- 6.11. Decisions on whether to award a loan are made within two working days (unless the necessity for additional supporting evidence means that this is not possible) whilst decisions on whether to award a grant are made within nine working days (if all or part of the need for which the application has been made can be met by another statutory service, then the applicants may also be directed to this department or organisation, ensuring that there is no duplication in the provision of financial support).

Disbursal Mechanisms

- 6.12. In March 2013, Lewisham Plus Credit Union (LPCU) were contracted to manage the payment and recovery process for Emergency Loans on behalf of the Council.

It was anticipated that they would provide added value through their ability to offer financial/budgeting advice and access to affordable credit, thus promoting positive behavioural change amongst applicants. All successful applicants for loans would be referred to the LPCU, who would make arrangements to disburse funds to them (including signing applicants up to their terms and conditions for issuing and repaying the loan, which would involve levying a 2% monthly interest rate).

- 6.13. In practice, due to capacity issues within LPCU, loans for living expenses (which are typically more frequent and of lower value) were administered by the Post Office between Monday and Wednesday using their PayOut system (where the applicant receives an SMS or email with instructions for collecting their cash payment from any Post Office). LPCU still administered loans for living expenses on Thursdays and Fridays (to ensure that the applicant's award was not delayed until Monday as a result of longer turnaround times for Post Office payments) as well as loan payments for specific items or Rent in Advance (which tend to be less frequent and of higher value). However, following a review of capacity and LPCU's recent move to larger, more accessible premises in December 2014, they have now taken on responsibility for administering all loan payments.

7. LOCAL SUPPORT SCHEME – OUTCOMES OF REVIEW

- 7.1. The main findings of the review are summarised below:

Demand

- 7.2. Under the nationally administered Social Fund scheme (2011/12), there were 12,100 applications for Crisis Loans and Community Care Grants from Lewisham residents. Two thirds (66.5%) of all applications were for Crisis Loans and, of this total, 83% were for living expenses rather than specific items. If it is assumed that these were all new applications, then (based on the 2011 census figure of 116,000 households in the borough) approximately 10.5% of all households made an application during this year. However, there are likely to be a number of repeat applications (as a maximum of three loans per year could be awarded under the Social Fund Scheme), meaning that the true percentage of households making an application will be lower, although the DWP data does not provide this level of detail.
- 7.3. During the first year of Lewisham's Local Support Scheme (2013/14), a total of 2,150 applications were received, which was significantly lower than anticipated. Of these applications, 747 (34.7%) were successful, with unsuccessful applications rejected because they did not meet the eligibility criteria (see Appendix A). It should be noted that a considerable number of these rejections were the result of incorrect referrals to the scheme by the JobCentre Plus (where applicants should have instead been considered for a Short-Term Benefit Advance, which is still administered by the DWP).
- 7.4. The vast majority of these applications were made online, with only 158 applications made by telephone between April 2013 and March 2014 (representing less than 5% of total contact).

Spend

- 7.5. The total expenditure in Lewisham for both Crisis Loans and Community Care Grants during 2011/12 was just under £1.8m. Successful applicants for Community Care Grants received the largest awards (an average of £754 per event), likely reflecting the intended purpose of the grant as a resettlement tool. Those who successfully applied for Crisis Loans to cover the cost of living expenses received the lowest award (£54 per event), likely reflecting the much higher number of applications and their role in supporting people during a short-term cash-flow emergency.
- 7.6. During 2013/14, £38k was spent on Emergency Loans and £198k on Support Grants (totalling £236k) for Lewisham's new Local Support Scheme, which was considerably lower than expected. In addition, spend to date for 2014/15 has also been lower than originally anticipated (£179k). However, it is important to note that the majority of boroughs (including Lambeth and Southwark) have experienced similarly low levels of demand and spend since April 2013.
- 7.7. For Emergency Loans, the disbursement of funds was split between LPCU and the Post Office, with a total of £9.5k and £28.5k respectively being paid between April 2013 and March 2014. Of this overall amount, £5.5k has been repaid by applicants. It should be noted that 38% of the funds disbursed by the LPCU have been recovered compared to 7% recovered via the Post Office. This supports the decision to move the administration of all loan payments to the LPCU.

Demographic Profile

- 7.8. The majority of applicants for Crisis Loans in 2011/12 were fairly young (63% of those applying for specific items were aged between 18 and 34, as were 60% of those applying for living expenses). In addition, 18% of those applying for specific items and 20% of those applying for living expenses were aged between 35 and 44. No applications were received from those over 65. The age range of residents applying for Community Care Grants was slightly wider, likely reflecting the predominant aim of the grant in providing resettlement support or diverting applicants away from institutional/residential care. Over a fifth of applicants were aged between 18 and 24 whilst 14% were aged over 55, although nearly half (48%) were aged between 25 and 44.
- 7.9. Although the data recorded by the IEG4 system (which the Council uses to process applications) does not disaggregate the age profile by loans or grants, a similar pattern can be observed to the previous DWP scheme, with the majority of applicants (47.1%) aged between 25 and 39. However, a further 18.4% were aged under 25 whilst 32.8% were aged between 40 and 65. Again, very few applications were received from those aged over 65 (1.7%), but this is likely to be the result of lower demand. Similarly, those applying for Crisis Loans in 2011/12 were mainly single men (62% of applicants for specific items and 54% of applicants for living expenses). This proportion was reversed for Community Care Grants, with 60% of applications made by single women.
- 7.10. However, lone parents were also a significant group; for Crisis Loans, 18% and 23% of applicants for specific items and living items respectively were lone

parents whilst the figure for Community Care Grants was 39%. In addition, nearly three-quarters of dependent children for both types of award were less than five years old. It is likely that many of these lone parents are also affected by other welfare reforms, primarily the benefit cap (national analysis by the DWP in September 2013 revealed that of the 18,024 households currently capped, 88% had three or more children whilst 60% were single parent households).

7.11. The IEG4 system does not easily allow access to the same level of detail, but it is apparent that a high proportion (31.6%) of applicants for emergency loans between April 2013 and March 2014 were lone parents, although the largest group was still single adults (56.7%). The figures for support grants were similar, with lone parents comprising 35.7% of applicants and single adults comprising 60% of applicants.

7.12. The DWP were not able to provide information on tenure types or ward profile for Lewisham residents applying to the previous scheme, but the data recorded by the IEG4 system indicates that the majority of applicants between April 2013 and March 2014 (43%) live in the social rented sector (either council or RSL accommodation) whilst a further 20% live in the private rented sector. A very small number were owner-occupiers (1%) but a significant proportion (13%) were of no fixed abode (indicating the value of the additional clause within the residency criteria to allow these applicants to use their benefit correspondence address). Unsurprisingly, the wards with the highest number of applicants were typically the more deprived in the borough (Rushey Green; 12.2%, Lewisham Central; 9.1%, Evelyn; 7.4%, New Cross; 6.6% and Perry Vale; 6.3%) although those wards which tend to be more affluent also received a high number of applicants (Telegraph Hill; 8.2%, Sydenham; 6.9% and Brockley; 6.5%).

Evaluation

7.13. Although Lewisham's scheme was designed to target limited funds at those most in need and ensure its sustainability for future years, it is apparent that the demand since April 2013 has been nowhere near as high as expected (this situation was replicated in other boroughs, such as Lambeth and Southwark).

7.14. Although the reasons for this reduction in demand are not fully known, the following factors are likely to have had a significant impact:

- Officers ensure that applicants are currently receiving the benefits to which they are entitled, whilst the DWP have retained responsibility for managing Short-Term Benefit Advances where there has been a delay in the assessment of an applicant's benefit claim (which was a high-spend area under the previous Social Fund scheme)
- Lewisham's Local Support Scheme (like many other emergency welfare assistance schemes) was also designed to address the underlying reasons for repeat applications, which are most commonly the result of ineffective budgeting and unrealistic levels of household expenditure (e.g. multiple mobile phone contracts or expensive satellite TV packages). Such applicants are now referred to organisations like the LPCU and Money

Advice for budgeting advice and debt management, which aim to maximise their existing income (thus reducing the need for Emergency Loans)

- Officers also negotiate the level of award directly with the applicant to ensure that they receive sufficient funds to meet their need, but that repayments are also affordable (rather than providing a standard award amount, which may be more than required)
- Working with the LPCU has created opportunities for applicants to access affordable credit, so further loan requests can be managed via credit union membership rather than the Local Support Scheme
- Lewisham's Universal Credit pilot and subsequent Local Support Services Framework pilot (working with Lambeth and Southwark) have embedded a more holistic approach to support, focusing on wider issues (such as employment, housing and the impact of other welfare reform changes) rather than simply making loan payments

Wider Impact

7.15. There is no evidence to suggest that the scheme itself is causing hardship amongst residents. However, officers undertook a short project to determine whether the low demand and spend rates for the Local Support Scheme had increased the pressure on voluntary sector organisations. Analysis revealed that although there had been a rise in attendance at Food Banks within the borough, this was largely due to the impact of the DWP sanctions regime (which is not covered by the Local Support Scheme).

7.16. As a result of this work, officers developed a bespoke training session for Food Bank volunteers at the Trussell Trust to raise awareness about how the JobCentre Plus operates, the potential impact of the DWP decision-making process and how they could better advise their clients in order to mitigate the risk of sanctions or, if sanctions were applied, ensure they liaised with the Council to prevent their entitlement to other benefits from being adversely affected.

7.17. In summary, officers believe that the right approach has largely been taken in the design and delivery of the Local Support Scheme to date, but that several amendments are required to ensure its future effectiveness (as outlined in section 10).

8. LOCAL SUPPORT SCHEME – FUNDING

8.1. In August 2012, the DWP announced the level of funding that would be provided to each local authority to disburse annually to successful applicants. Lewisham was allocated £1.5m to deliver its emergency welfare assistance scheme in 2013/14, which was 18% less than the amount that the DWP spent in Lewisham for the same purpose during 2011/12 (£1.8m). Additionally, a grant of £300k was provided for 2013/14 to fund set-up and administration costs.

8.2. In December 2013, the DWP confirmed it would provide the same level of funding for 2014/15, but that funding for all emergency welfare assistance schemes would

be withdrawn from 2015/16 onwards. This decision was judicially reviewed and the DWP were subsequently instructed to undertake a full consultation with local authorities regarding the withdrawal of funding, which ended in November 2014. Officers provided an individual response on behalf of the Council and also contributed to a cross-borough response submitted by London Councils (see Appendix B). However, no dedicated funding has been provided by the DWP for future years.

- 8.3. As the spend on Emergency Loans and Support Grants during 2013/14 was significantly lower than expected, there was an underspend of £1.2m at the end of the financial year (taking into account fund transfers to third parties, such as the LPCU). The projected spend for 2014/15 is also lower than expected (£220k) which is likely to result in a similar level of underspend at the end of this financial year.
- 8.4. Like the majority of London boroughs, Lewisham intends to use this underspend to fund the future delivery of the Local Support Scheme. To enable this, it has been agreed that the total amount (£2.4m) will be ringfenced. For most boroughs, this will allow them to continue their schemes for between one and two years, depending on the level of residual funding available. However, the efficient way in which the Local Support Scheme has been designed and operated to date will enable Lewisham to continue delivery for a further three or four years (subject to more detailed analysis), whilst the proposed shared service approach will enable the remaining funds to be spent in the most judicious manner.

9. LOCAL SUPPORT SCHEME – FUTURE DELIVERY ARRANGEMENTS

- 9.1. In developing their schemes, officers from Lambeth, Lewisham and Southwark worked closely together to ensure that there was a broadly consistent approach across the sub-region. In late summer 2013, leaders from these three boroughs indicated that they wanted officers to explore the feasibility of establishing shared services in a number of areas, including the creation of a single administrative unit for the provision of emergency welfare assistance as a means of reducing delivery costs.
- 9.2. As a result, a joint review of Lambeth, Lewisham and Southwark's schemes was undertaken in October 2013 to identify where there were significant similarities or differences in the eligibility criteria, delivery models and disbursement mechanisms and explore opportunities for closer working arrangements. The recommendation within the joint review to establish a full shared service (i.e. joining up both policy and delivery) was adopted and an officer group was established to undertake further work in this area.
- 9.3. Although the DWP announced in December 2013 that funding for emergency welfare assistance schemes will be withdrawn from 2015/16 onwards, there was broad agreement across all three boroughs that a shared service model should still be pursued. A proposal has now been developed that would implement a shared service in two distinct phases:
 - **Phase 1.** In this phase, a shared back-office would be established for Lambeth and Lewisham's schemes. This would bring together staffing,

assessment and administration functions into a central hub located at one of these boroughs, enabling joint delivery. However, the policies, eligibility criteria and disbursal mechanisms for each scheme would remain separate, so applicants would continue to receive a differentiated service based on their locality.

- **Phase 2.** The second phase would involve scaling up the shared back-office into a fully integrated shared service. This will require a significant amount of work, including the alignment of policies, eligibility criteria, application and assessment processes as well as the negotiation of joint contracts with providers and suppliers.

10. LOCAL SUPPORT SCHEME – POLICY REVIEW

10.1. As a result of the operational review, the Local Support Scheme policy was amended under delegated responsibility to include two new elements (see Appendix C):

'Starting Work' Award

10.2. The one-off 'job grant' of £100 which was payable to applicants starting full-time work also ended in April 2013 as part of welfare reform. The DWP stated that that 'job grant' (and other 'in work' awards) created a barrier to sustainable long-term employment as applicants remained in receipt of benefits for long enough to qualify for these awards, sign-off and reclaim. Eligible applicants are now referred to other forms of financial support which are still linked to certain benefit types and/or the duration of time the applicant has been in receipt of a qualifying benefit, but anecdotal evidence has suggested that the ending of the 'job grant' and the exclusivity of alternative support options has caused additional hardship to various customer groups.

10.3. The new 'Starting Work' award demonstrates Lewisham's commitment to supporting all residents into meaningful employment. Payment is made in the form of a loan for living expenses up to a maximum of £250 (the same level as Lambeth's similar award) following receipt of sufficient evidence regarding employment and only one award will be granted per year in order to prevent recurrent applications.

Rent In Advance Pilot Scheme

10.4. During the first year of operation, Lewisham recognised an additional need for Rent In Advance payments from those who are not supported by the Council's Single Homeless Intervention & Prevention (SHIP) service and do not meet the eligibility criteria for Support Grants.

10.5. As a result, officers have provided funding for a pilot scheme jointly operated by SHIP and the LPCU. Under this scheme, applicants who have been assessed by SHIP and do not meet the eligibility criteria for Support Grants or any other statutory duty may in some circumstances be referred by SHIP assessment officers directly to the Credit Union for a Rent In Advance payment (in the form of

a loan). The outcomes of the pilot will be regularly reviewed in order to ensure that it responds effectively to the additional support need identified by the Council.

Further Review

- 10.6. As outlined in section 8, a phased approach has been proposed for the implementation of a fully integrated shared service between Lewisham and Lambeth. Whilst the policy intentions of both boroughs are broadly similar, there are currently a number of differences in the assessment process and disbursement mechanisms. However, work has already begun to align the most common areas of decision-making in preparation for the first phase in April 2015, ensuring that residents across both boroughs are not disadvantaged (although they would still receive a differentiated service based on their location at this stage). This report therefore recommends that authority is delegated to the Executive Director for Customer Services to make minor amendments to the policy in future to ensure that this work can continue and the scheme is able to respond quickly to emerging needs. A threshold will be proposed to determine 'minor' and any change to the scheme will be reported to the lead member and Mayor and Cabinet.
- 10.7. Cohesive decision-making is also necessary to ensure that the residual budget allocated to the shared service each year is utilised effectively. For example, Lewisham and Lambeth are in the process of developing a joint formula to calculate living expenses and fuel awards where a loan application has been successful. Evidence from both boroughs suggests that the existing award levels can be reduced, which will provide consistent and equitable award rates, improved budgetary control and ensure that loan repayments are more affordable (whilst still meeting the needs of applicants). The same structured and equitable approach will be taken to align eligibility criteria across the shared service.

11. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1. Over the past two financial years, the Council has received grants totalling in the region of £1.8m per annum for the Local Support Scheme.
- 11.2. At the end of 2013/14, an underspend of £1.2m was identified and set aside in an ear marked reserve for the continuation of the scheme once grant funding ceased.
- 11.3. Current estimates indicate that a similar level of underspend will occur this year and a further £1.2m will be added to the reserve.
- 11.4. Initial indications show that the proposed changes to the scheme can be financed for 3 to 4 years.
- 11.5. Any proposals to extend the scheme will need to consider any exit costs should funding not be available beyond that term.

12. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 12.1. Any local scheme must take account of the Council's statutory duties, including the duty to mitigate the effects of child poverty pursuant to the Child Poverty Act

2010, the duty to prevent homelessness pursuant to the provisions of the Housing Act 1996 and the 'public sector equality duty' pursuant to the Equality Act 2010.

12.2. The Equality Act 2010 (the Act) introduced a new 'public sector equality duty' (the equality duty or the duty). It covers the following nine protected characteristics: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.

12.3. In summary, the Council must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not

12.4. The duty continues to be a "have regard duty", and the weight to be attached to it is a matter for the Mayor, bearing in mind the issues of relevance and proportionality. It is not an absolute requirement to eliminate unlawful discrimination, advance equality of opportunity or foster good relations.

12.5. The Equality and Human Rights Commission has recently issued Technical Guidance on the Public Sector Equality Duty and statutory guidance entitled "Equality Act 2010 Services, Public Functions & Associations Statutory Code of Practice". The Council must have regard to the statutory code in so far as it relates to the duty and attention is drawn to Chapter 11 which deals particularly with the equality duty. The Technical Guidance also covers what public authorities should do to meet the duty. This includes steps that are legally required, as well as recommended actions. The guidance does not have statutory force but nonetheless regard should be had to it, as failure to do so without compelling reason would be of evidential value. The statutory code and the technical guidance can be found at:
<http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/legal-and-policy/equality-act/equality-act-codes-of-practice-and-technical-guidance/>

12.6. The Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) has previously issued five guides for public authorities in England giving advice on the equality duty:

- The essential guide to the public sector equality duty
- Meeting the equality duty in policy and decision-making
- Engagement and the equality duty
- Equality objectives and the equality duty
- Equality information and the equality duty

12.7. The essential guide provides an overview of the equality duty requirements including the general equality duty, the specific duties and who they apply to. It covers what public authorities should do to meet the duty including steps that are legally required, as well as recommended actions. The other four documents

provide more detailed guidance on key areas and advice on good practice. Further information and resources are available at:
<http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/advice-and-guidance/public-sector-equality-duty/guidance-on-the-equality-duty>

12.8. This proposal is necessarily subject to a full Equality Act Assessment (EAA), as confirmed within section 14 below.

13. CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

13.1. There are no specific crime and disorder implications arising from this report.

14. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

14.1. A full Equalities Analysis Assessment (EAA) was undertaken during the development of the Local Support Scheme to determine whether its key principles were likely to have a positive, neutral or negative impact on different protected characteristics within the local community and identify mitigating actions to address any disproportionately negative outcomes.

14.2. The overall assessment of available data and research, plus the findings from the consultation exercise, found that there were few specific barriers to accessing the scheme and where these existed (mainly in access, both physical and technological, for the elderly and disabled) there was an opportunity to mitigate the impact via ongoing contract negotiations and scheduled review processes. As a result of this EAA, a decision was made to amend the residency criteria to include those with no fixed abode and completely remove the criteria which excluded non-householders from making applications, which will enable a number of more vulnerable residents (including young people, sofa surfers and rough sleepers) to access the scheme.

14.3. It is not anticipated that the policy amendments outlined in section 10 will have a negative impact on the local community as they are intended to widen the accessibility of the scheme and better support those residents who are most in need. However, the outcomes will be monitored regularly as part of the ongoing review process and mitigating actions will be taken where required to address any concerns. In addition, a further EAA will be undertaken as part of the work to establish a fully integrated shared service, ensuring that equalities issues continue to be positively reflected in the delivery of the Local Support Scheme.

15. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

15.1. There are no specific environmental implications arising from this report.

16. CONCLUSION

16.1. Lewisham's Local Support Scheme has now been in place for nearly two years. Although the operational review found that demand and spend were lower than expected during this period, it concluded that the scheme was effective and met the needs of vulnerable residents in an equitable way. By ringfencing the existing and projected underspend and using it to fund future provision, it will be possible

to sustain the scheme for a further three or four years whilst administrative costs will be reduced by sharing delivery with Lambeth.

17. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS AND AUTHOR

17.1. For more information on this report, please contact Ralph Wilkinson (Head of Public Services) on 020 8314 6040.

17.2. The following documents are attached to this report:

- Review Data (Appendix A)
- Lewisham Consultation Response (Appendix B)
- Revised Policy (Appendix C)