

Report to :	STRATEGIC COMMISSIONING BOARD
Date :	30 September 2020
Reporting Officers:	<p>Sarah Threlfall – Assistant Director Policy, Performance and Communications</p> <p>Emma Varnam – Assistant Director Operations and Neighbourhoods</p> <p>Ilys Cookson – Assistant Director Exchequer Services</p> <p>Tracy Morris – Assistant Director Children’s Services</p> <p>Debbie Watson – Assistant Director Population Health</p>
Subject :	GRANT NO. 31/5110: LOCAL AUTHORITY EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE GRANT FOR FOOD AND ESSENTIAL SUPPLIES
Report Summary :	<p>The report outlines a proposal to spend the £331,533.64 provided to Tameside Council as part of the government’s <i>‘Local Authority Emergency Assistance Grant for Food and Essential Supplies’</i> fund. The proposals are one off schemes due to the non-recurrent nature of the grant from government. The report also suggests consideration is given to the establishment of a Tameside Welfare Assistance Scheme to build an ongoing model of emergency support to those in financial crisis to avoid escalation in outcomes and costs for both individuals and public bodies supporting them.</p>
Recommendations :	<p>Agree the proposals outlined in the report go forward for formal agreement by the Strategic Commissioning Board and Executive Cabinet. That is, the</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spending proposals for Grant No. 31/5110; and • Development of a Tameside Welfare Assistance Scheme.
Links to Corporate Plan:	<p>A key aim of the Corporate Plan is to assist to those in the community in greatest need of support, both in the immediate term and in a sustainable way for the future. The proposals outlined in this report support that aim in the area of poverty and financial hardship.</p>
Policy Implications :	<p>The report proposes the development of a Tameside Welfare Assistance Scheme. In the first instances to enable the distribution of some of the monies from Grant No. 31/5110; and for that to be developed further in the longer term as part of a wider approach to support for those in financial hardship and/or unable to access food and basic essentials.</p>
Financial Implications : (Authorised by the statutory Section 151 Officer & Chief Finance Officer)	<p>This funding was announced in July 2020 and Tameside’s allocation is £331k. The table in section 3.3 describes how the funding is intended to be spent.</p> <p>There will be regular returns required by DEFRA as to the type and amount of spend and the Council must ensure that it spends in line with the requirements of the grant. DEFRA expect minimal amounts to be spent on the administration of the scheme</p>
Legal Implications : (Authorised by the Borough Solicitor)	<p>In relation to Local Authority Emergency Assistance Grant for Food and Essential Supplies it is critical that the council complies with all of the terms of that grant particularly in relation to the purposes the grant can be used for together with the reporting and management function to mitigate the risk of any withholding and claw back provisions. Legal</p>

services are available to provide advice to the project officers as required.

In relation to the use of the grant money the council not only needs to be mindful that it complies with the terms of the emergency grant agreement but also that the grant agreements it awards are appropriate, fit for purpose and comply with state aid requirements.

In addition where the grant is to be used to procure services advice should be sought from STAR in relation to the most appropriate procurement route and the Council's Contract and Financial Procedure Rules must be complied with.

Risk Management :

The approach and activity outlined in the report ensures that Tameside Council meets its obligations with regards to spending of Grant 31/5110.

Access to Information :

The background papers relating to this report can be inspected by contacting Simon Brunet, Head of Policy of Policy, Performance and Intelligence.



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1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 In the period of national lockdown the government's focus was very much on support to the clinical extremely vulnerable (CEV) who were shielding with access to food supplies. Councils, while also supporting the national shielding programme locally, were also helping those affected by the wider social and economic impacts of lockdown (both shielded and not shielded). These included isolation and financial hardship, and in particular the consequent knock on effects of financial hardship on a person's ability to access food, fuel and pay their housing costs. As national lockdown ended and shielding was lifted the issues of physical access (due to shielding) to food and medicines dissipated. However the social and economic impacts remain, and sadly will only increase with the end of furlough and the evictions moratorium.
- 1.2 In acknowledgement of the wider impacts beyond shielding the government has provided local authorities with an emergency assistance grant for food and essential supplies. This paper outlines a series of proposals for how to spend the grant in Tameside.

2. GRANT NO. 31/5110

- 2.1 The government announced an emergency fund of £63 million to be distributed to local authorities in England to help those who are struggling to afford food and other essentials due to Covid-19. *Grant No. 31/5110: Local Authority Emergency Assistance Grant for Food and Essential Supplies* is a one-off contribution for the 2020/21 financial year and is made under Section 31 of the Local Government Act 2003.
- 2.3 The grant letter defines the purpose of the funding as – '*to help local authorities to continue to support those struggling to afford food and other essentials over the coming months due to COVID-19*'. The grant guidance is relatively short and provides some flexibility for local discretion. The key points from the grant guidance are summarised below;
- use discretion on how to identify and support those most in need
 - use the funding to meet immediate need and help those who are struggling to afford food and essentials due to Covid-19
 - use the funding for existing schemes and other support which deliver the same outcomes and where the need is greatest
 - use cash or vouchers where practical – as this may reduce pressure on your local partners
 - advise provide information to people to help them access longer term support they might need, such as benefits
 - decide which approach is suitable in your community
 - manage the risk of fraud (both eligibility and payments)
 - comply with state aid rules and not use the funding for economic purposes
 - avoid funding overlaps by understanding the full circumstances of need and existing support for an individual or family
 - keep administrative costs to a minimum
 - comply with the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED)
 - monitor spending and report into Defra through regular financial returns and a spending plan survey
- 2.4 The allocation for Tameside Metropolitan Borough Council is £331,533.64.

3. PROPOSAL FOR ALLOCATION OF THE GRANT

- 3.1 The table at **Appendix 1** summarises the spending proposal for the grant. Each investment seeks to achieve one or more of the following aims – alleviate extreme hardship; ensure access to the most basic essentials such as food and fuel; sustain tenancies and prevent homelessness; help families stay together; provide relief from immediate financial crisis; identify the cause of issues and work with people to find long-term sustainability and resilience.

- 3.2 All investment is one-off in the financial year 2020/21 (albeit the provision and final spend could run over into 2021/22 where funding is as a grant to a third party).
- 3.3 The spending proposals are summarised in the table below and in more detail at **Appendix 1**.

PROVISION	£
The Bread and Butter Thing	£100,000
Food support (investment in existing and new groups providing access to affordable food)	£30,000
Action Together coordination and support to voluntary, community, faith and social enterprise groups working with vulnerable people affected by Covid-19 in terms of access to basic supplies and essentials – food, fuel, clothing etc.	£85,000
Family support (provision of basic essentials like nappies, formula milk, school uniform, cots to families with babies and young children)	£15,000
Groundwork energy advice and support (top up to the existing Energy Redress funding secured by Groundwork)	£20,000
Financial and debt advice (additional capacity for the Welfare Rights team either employed or commissioned)	£40,000
Development and Sustainability Officer (fixed term post to oversee the delivery of the schemes, identify future opportunities , plan for sustainability and develop a Welfare Assistance Scheme)	£40,000
TOTAL	£330,000

- 3.4 All the above elements are linked to advice and guidance. Anyone accessing assistance will be provided with support to resolve issues and identify sustainable solutions.

4. WELFARE ASSISTANCE SCHEME

- 4.1 Tameside Council does not currently have a Welfare Assistance Scheme open to residents to apply for emergency support and/or that is available to support workers in Welfare Rights, Exchequer Services and others to access and provide financial assistance (or provision of goods) to clients they are working with.
- 4.2 The discretionary element of the Social Fund was abolished as part of the Welfare Reform Act 2012. The elements funded and administered by local government were Crisis Loans and Community Care Grants. They ceased at the end of the financial year 2012/13. Councils were asked by the government to develop new provision in response to local demand using the funding previously available as part of the Social Fund (albeit a reduced amount) – an approach similar to that for Council Tax support, although it was not a mandated statutory requirement to establish a scheme.
- 4.3 Tameside Council – working with partners – established the Tameside Independent Living Scheme. The scheme was part of a wider support network that provided support for people in a crisis and those in need of support to live independently. It aimed to provide a safety net in an emergency or when there was an immediate and serious risk to the health or safety of the applicant and their family and enable people to stay living at home or resettle into a new home following a period in institutional care, prison, temporary accommodation of living an unsettled way of life. In broad terms eligibility criteria were based on having a low income, no savings and experiencing a situation that warrants support in order to meet the aims as outlined.
- 4.4 Support available included emergency financial payments payable as a grant; the provision of household items; and referral to other support agencies. Financial support was provided as a one off grant to cover the costs of items such as clothing, food, toiletries, fuel top ups, travel, rent advance and other emergency housing costs. Household items such as a microwave or kitchen utensils were purchased and provided.

- 4.5 The scheme ceased a few years ago. Although some aspects of the support provided are picked up within other areas such as the work of the Homelessness Team in helping people secure tenancies etc.
- 4.6 It is proposed that consideration is giving to the establishment of a new scheme on similar terms. The purpose being to draw together some of the elements outlined in the plan to spend Covid-19 support grant (Grant No. 31/5110) with a view to providing a model that is available beyond that limited funding in recognition of the impact of Covid-19 being substantial over the next few years.
- 4.7 The overarching aim of any Welfare Assistance Scheme would be to provide some form of stability in a financial crisis tied to advice and support to build resilience. Alongside this, a scheme will prevent escalation of problems and the associated knock on costs for public bodies (e.g. temporary accommodation, crisis health support).

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 5.1 As outlined on the front of the report.