

By: Graham Gibbens, Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Public Health

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To: Adult Social Care and Health Cabinet Committee – 14 March 2017

Subject: **KENT SUPPORT AND ASSISTANCE SERVICE UPDATE**

Classification: Unrestricted

Past Pathway of Paper: None

Future Pathway of Paper: None

Electoral Divisions: All

Summary: This paper provides an update on the activities of the Kent Support and Assistance Service.

Recommendation: The Adult Social Care and Health Cabinet Committee is asked to **CONSIDER** and **COMMENT** on the content of the report.

1. Introduction

1.1 The Kent Support and Assistance Service (KSAS) is the Council's response to local welfare assistance in response to the devolution of responsibility and funding streams for two aspects of the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) Social Fund to upper tier and unitary authorities in April 2013.

1.2 Differing substantially from the DWP scheme which simply offered cash, the Kent model diverts demand from statutory services by linking those in need with local agencies who can provide longer term help in addressing the causal factors of the crisis. The stated aims of the service are to:

- Meet (or *help* meet) an immediate short term need in an emergency or crisis
- Meet (or *help* meet) a need for support to stay in the community
- Facilitate access or promote the engagement with support agencies

1.3 All applicants to the service receive information and advice about other help available to them. This information includes signposting both to the wealth of services and support available in communities that are local to applicants and advice about how to access help, grants, awards and other benefits that are available nationally including via the DWP.

- 1.4 The service also delivers an element of emergency support to prevent an immediate deterioration to an applicant's health, by providing short-term access to household fuel, food and limited supplies of clothing and baby consumables, such as nappies and milk.
- 1.5 Non-emergency support is provided to assist applicants to remain in the community or to move back into the community, after a period in supported or unsettled accommodation, by providing access to a range of standard items such as beds, bedding, furniture and white goods. The service also offers information and signposting to other support services, to both those who are eligible for the service and those who are not.
- 1.6 In this way the service is able to be both reactive in alleviating immediate short-term need and preventative, to guard against the further escalation of support required by statutory services and the resulting costs incurred.
- 1.7 Eligibility criteria are contained in Appendix 1. The service operates a risk matrix which assigns priority to all applications for awards. Highest priority is given to households that include:
 - Children under 5 years of age
 - 3 or more children
 - A disabled child
 - Domestic abuse
- 1.8 At inception, access to the service was solely via a dedicated telephone number within the Council's call centre where trained call centre staff would take applications over the phone by specialist assessors. In April 2014 the Council opened an online application system to enable:
 - faster processing of all applications and reduce customer waiting times
 - better data collection and analysis of demand
 - standardised offer to all applicants
 - reduction in back office costs
- 1.9 The online system currently accounts for approximately 50% of all applications. Telephone enquiries and applications are taken by the contact centre via Agilisys, whilst assessment and processing of applications is undertaken by a specialist team of assessment officers.
- 1.10 The support KSAS offers falls under three broad headings:
 - Information and Signposting – this important element of the scheme offers long term help and support from agencies around the County and ensures that Kent residents receive help outside of the Council's services wherever possible. Applicants are directed to DWP Budgeting Advance schemes, Discretionary Housing Benefits Payments, debt management support, advocacy or access to help with employment and training.

- Emergency Support – provision of grocery products, energy vouchers, travelling expenses etc. Food and hygiene items are delivered through high street supermarkets, providing supplies for up to seven days. Energy vouchers, travel vouchers and cash (in very exceptional circumstances) are delivered through the PayPoint Network.
- Non-emergency Support – provision of household items such as furniture, cots, bedding and limited white goods are delivered via a consortium of the Kent Furniture Re-use Sector.

1.11 KSAS is a component of both Kent's civil emergency response and the Council's Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme. All costs from the relocation scheme are recovered from the Home Office.

2. The current position

2.1 The service has received 7514 applications for help in the period April 2016 – January 2017 from many more thousands of enquiries. 45% of these enquiries were diverted to other sources of help in local communities, via the advice and guidance of the specialist team. 55% of all applications (4155 households) went on to receive an award in addition to this further guidance.

2.2 Access to the Department of Work and Pensions back office data system protects the Council from fraudulent applications whilst ensuring that awards are made to those who are in genuine need.

2.3 The service is effective in preventing escalation of need and ongoing referral to statutory adult and children's social care in particular those families where financial assistance is required to safeguard and promote the wellbeing of a child in need. Case studies attached at Appendix 2 show examples of how the service has successfully achieved this aim.

2.4 In families with children, awards are most commonly food, energy and household items such as cots and cot bedding. Most awards of travel and clothing are for those who are fleeing or have fled domestic abuse.

2.5 The service is a first port of call for the Council's social work teams who are working with families in need that may require financial assistance under Section 17 (S17) of the Children Act (1989). Current KCC operational procedures direct staff to make applications direct to KSAS in the first instance, thereby diverting demand from families whose needs would have been met under S17 of the Act. In addition to the cost of the items themselves, the KSAS service is able to link the family with other resources in their community, saving the ongoing commitment of assessment and involvement of panels, team managers and service managers.

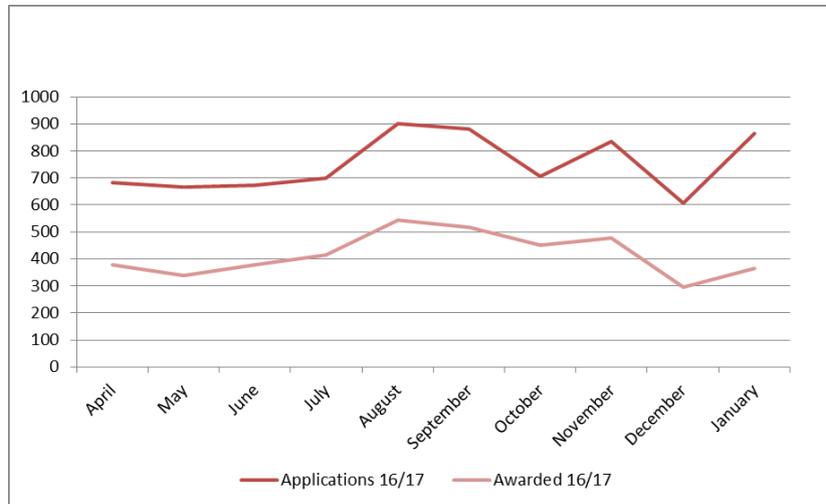
3. Financial Implications

3.1 The budget for 2016/17 for the service is £1,487,400.

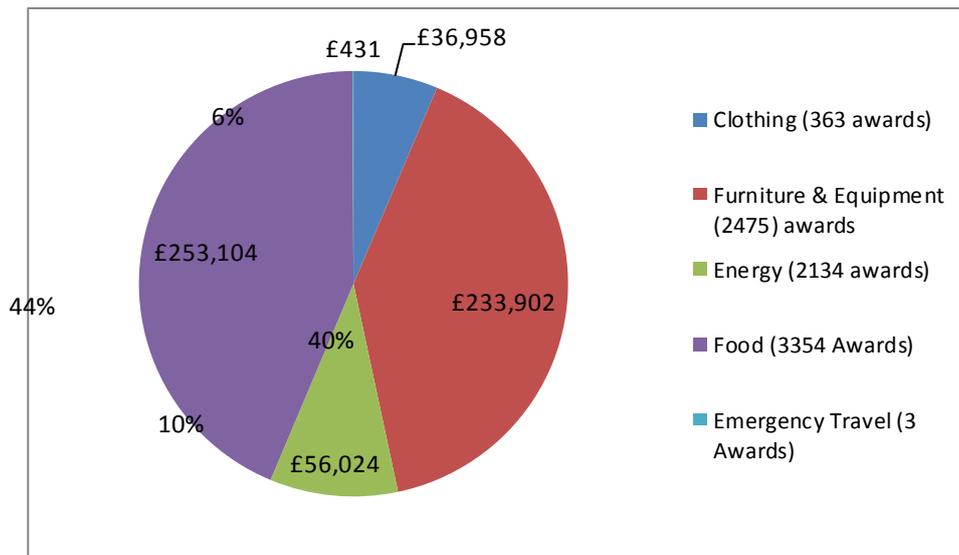
- 3.2 The budget for 2017/18 was approved at the February meeting of the County Council to be £1,146,900
- 3.3 An overview of the weekly applications and award value is provided in Figure 3 below.

Fig. 3

(i) 2016/17 April – January Weekly applications



(ii) 2016/17 April – January Components awarded



- 3.4 The most frequently requested items are food and energy and these items are commonly asked for together. Though frequent, the values of these awards are relatively low. The scheme makes around 95 awards per week for food at an average cost of £75. An energy award is typically £35.

- 3.5 Applications for furniture comprise several components such as beds, cots, curtains and sofas. These components are more expensive and the average cost of a household award, though less frequent is higher; typically in the region of £500.
- 3.6 Against a backdrop of increasing applications, the average value of an award is £73. Operating costs have been reduced significantly since the service inception. The staffing complement has been reduced by 44% since the inception of the service to its current levels. This has been achieved via efficiencies in the processing of awards, a shift to online applications and adjustments in the offer of awards.
- 3.7 With the online application service both established and effective, there are further opportunities to enhance the process and reduce operating costs in the future. These opportunities and any equality implications are currently being explored.
- 3.8 Opportunities to further harness, enhance and network local advice and support services are also being examined.

4. Equality Implications

- 4.1 There are no equality implications associated with this report. However if changes were made to the model of service delivery any equality implications would be considered at the time.

5. Legal Implications

- 5.1 There are no legal implications associated with this report. However if changes were made to the model of service delivery any legal implications would be considered at the time.

6. Recommendations

<p>6.1 Recommendation: The Adult Social Care and Health Cabinet Committee is asked to CONSIDER and COMMENT on the content of the report.</p>

7. Background Documents

None

8. Contact Details

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