

WIRRAL COUNCIL

TRANSFORMATION AND RESOURCES POLICY & PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE

15 JULY 2015

SUBJECT:	LOCAL WELFARE ASSISTANCE SCHEME SCRUTINY REVIEW
REPORT OF:	THE CHAIR OF THE SCRUTINY REVIEW PANEL

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report provides background information regarding the report of the Local Welfare Assistance Scheme Scrutiny Review which was referred to Cabinet for consideration of the recommendations made.
- 1.2 The final report of the Scrutiny Review is attached as **Appendix 1**.

2.0 BACKGROUND AND KEY ISSUES

- 2.1 Direct funding has now been withdrawn by central government effective from 1st April 2015 for local welfare assistance with the recommendation that Local Authorities should consider funding schemes from their general fund.
- 2.2 On 10th February 2015, Cabinet agreed as part of its budget resolutions that £900,000 would be held in a reserve for this fund following the Government's decision to withdraw direct funding effective from April 1st 2015. The following minute was recorded.

“This fund provides financial assistance to people in dire need. The government transferred responsibility for administering this from DWP to the Council together with a grant of £1.1m. The government announced that this grant was being cut with effect from March 2015. The Council has £600,000 in a reserve for this fund. Cabinet intends to make this available together with the anticipated underspend in 2014/15 of £300,000 to create a fund totalling £900,000 available for 2015/16. This will provide a local scheme to fill the gap left by the government's unwillingness to assist the most vulnerable in our communities. It is proposed that the 2014/15 policy be continued until the end of July 2015. In the interim, Cabinet asks the Scrutiny Review Group which has been set up to look at this fund to meet in order to make recommendations as to how this resource should be allocated.”

- 2.3 A Task & Finish Review Panel consisting of six Members was established, including Councillors Janette Williams, Tom Anderson, Phil Gilchrist, Paul Doughty, Mathew Patrick and Joe Walsh. At the scoping meeting for the review, it was agreed by the Review Panel that Councillor Janette Williams would be the Chair of the Review Panel.

2.4 To avoid an additional Transformation and Resources Policy & Performance Committee meeting being scheduled for the purpose of approving the final report, this Committee agreed a recommendation at the meeting held on 30th March 2015 to give delegated authority to the Scrutiny Review Panel to refer the final agreed report to Cabinet.

3.0 EVIDENCE GATHERING AND REPORT

3.1 An evidence day was conducted on 9th April 2015 as the approach to carry out the Scrutiny Review and the Review Panel met with a range of witnesses, including Council officers and representatives from a number of third sector organisations. Appropriate information was also requested by the Review Panel to help develop the recommendations made in the final report.

4.0 REFERRAL TO CABINET

4.1 The final report was referred to the Cabinet meeting held on 29th June 2015 and the Cabinet resolutions will be shared with Members at this Committee meeting.

5.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Members are requested to note the contents of this report and the Local Welfare Assistance Scheme Scrutiny Review Report.

REPORT AUTHOR: Michael Lester
telephone (0151) 691 8628
email Michaellester@wirral.gov.uk