A LOCAL JIGSAW: A STUDY INTO LOCAL WELFARE ASSISTANCE SCHEMES AND FOODBANKS
The Trussell Trust

The Trussell Trust is an anti-poverty charity that coordinates a network of over 425 foodbanks across the UK. Trussell Trust foodbanks provide three days’ worth of nutritionally balanced food and support to people in crisis in the UK. Foodbank volunteers are trained to provide a listening, non-judgemental, welcoming service and to signpost people to external agencies and services able to help resolve the underlying cause of the crisis. Many foodbanks offer free additional services, like money advice, and budgeting and cookery courses as part of the charity’s ‘More Than Food’ approach, to build resilience and help prevent people needing a foodbank again.

The Trussell Trust foodbank network provided 1,182,954 three day food supplies between 1st April 2016 and 31st March 2017, a 7% increase from the previous year, and issues with a benefit payment continues to be the most common cause of referral to a Trussell Trust foodbank.

Everyone who comes to a Trussell Trust foodbank is referred by a professional such as a social worker, health visitor or schools liaison officer. Over 30,000 frontline professionals refer people to Trussell Trust foodbanks. Over 90% of the food Trussell Trust foodbanks provide is donated by generous members of the public. In 2016-17, 11,175 tonnes of food were given to people in crisis.

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# A LOCAL JIGSAW: STUDY INTO LOCAL WELFARE ASSISTANCE SCHEMES AND FOODBANKS

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Foreword

At a time when foodbanks in The Trussell Trust network are doing more than ever to tackle the underlying causes of hunger and poverty in the U.K., The Trussell Trust is keenly aware that there are many instances where people could be helped before getting to the point of needing a foodbank referral.

Feedback from the foodbanks in our network has encouraged us to look more closely at localised welfare support programmes. Whilst our past research has highlighted problems with the implementation of national programmes, for example the availability of, and access to, Short-Term Benefit Advances\(^1\), with this report we are focusing on practical intervention and change at a local level. Local welfare provision acts as the safety net underneath the safety net of the social security system.

We welcome the positive approach to monitoring and evaluating policy implementation by the previous government, and hope to see it continue as this new government begins. This report identifies one area where the practical application of social policy needs more analysis.

Our findings show that tens of thousands of people are accessing local welfare assistance schemes and that there are many inspiring, innovative local projects run by public, private, and voluntary sector organisations designed to help people in a crisis. However, delivery approaches vary and there is a real need for the good work being done to be monitored and evaluated, so it can be shared and replicated to support local authorities and foodbanks to help people facing crises more effectively and efficiently.

To tackle hunger and poverty, charities, local government and central government should do more to identify good practice as well as gaps in the safety net for our most vulnerable citizens and consider whether funding for such schemes is adequate to address local needs. We hope that by supporting increased knowledge sharing and awareness about Local Welfare Assistance Scheme provision, a more informed debate will develop around the functioning of the safety net, and help to ensure that foodbanks, and the thousands of volunteers that run them, do not become an alternative to a properly functioning social security system.

We hope that highlighting the concerns and good practice identified in this document will inspire dialogue and action around our recommendations in the short and long term, encouraging the principle of ‘localism’ to be realised more successfully. This is just the beginning. We have scratched the surface and are calling for others working in the area of poverty and hunger in the UK to join us in exploring local welfare provision in more depth. When people fall into a crisis there must be sustainable structures in place to help support people back onto their feet.

David McAuley, CEO of The Trussell Trust

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Summary

There has been significant concern about the future of local welfare provision and the need for emergency welfare assistance does not appear to be diminishing. The principle behind both local welfare assistance schemes (LWAS) and The Trussell Trust foodbank model is to provide emergency support to local people in crisis situations. The overlap of interests and potential to work together is clear. However, it is important to emphasise that foodbanks do not want to become a permanent feature of the social security system. The Trussell Trust is keen to contribute to the debate and help local authorities to build a sustainable future for local welfare funding and provision, with the hope this will lead to a reduced need for foodbanks in future.

In this study, foodbanks and local authorities in England were contacted to find out more about their experience of local welfare assistance schemes in order to share knowledge and best practice, as well as identifying areas for improving service provision and interventions to reduce the number of people experiencing financial crisis.

Findings highlight the innovation and adaptation that exists among local welfare scheme providers. However, they also demonstrate a lack of benchmarking, guidelines, and patchy monitoring or evaluation which means that it can be difficult to assess the impact of the schemes in the local context or to compare them in the national context. There is a lack of research and development, and long-term strategy, around LWAS provision.

Feedback gathered from local authorities evidenced a variety in the numbers helped by the schemes, spending on the scheme, eligibility criteria, delivery, and different levels of monitoring and evaluation techniques. Local authorities and foodbanks reported positive intervention programmes both past and current. Many examples involved interaction around direct and indirect service provision. Local welfare programmes that had faced challenges or could be improved are also discussed.

Improved understanding of local need and provision could also inform the development and delivery of Universal Support, the Government’s measure to support people on Universal Credit. Local welfare provision and Universal Support are likely to become increasingly important as Universal Credit rolls out and as inflation continues to rise more quickly than incomes.

It is important for local authorities and national government to monitor this provision more closely in future in order to properly evaluate current programmes and enable the development of efficient, effective, and sustainable local welfare provision in future.
**Key Findings**

1) Need for LWAS is substantial. Tens of thousands of people accessed LWAS in the last financial year and this is likely to be a very conservative estimate, as this does not include applications or councils who did not submit data. Availability and access appears to be an issue in many cases.

2) Foodbank engagement with emergency welfare service provision is significant. Local authorities and foodbanks are being innovative and flexible in their approach to supporting local people who end up in a financial crisis but more needs to be done with regards to LWAS long-term strategy and budgeting.

3) Like foodbanks, local authorities have been investing in ways to address the underlying causes of people’s financial crisis and into making LWAS more sustainable in future. With further research, monitoring and evaluation, more appropriate, effective and efficient services can be developed and delivered through sharing knowledge, guidance, advice and benchmarking.

4) The continued rise in referrals to Trussell Trust foodbanks for emergency food since 2015 would suggest that the decrease in spending on LWAS is not due to a decrease in need. The insecurity around future LWAS provision is an annual concern for foodbanks and the communities they serve. A longer-term and more secure, funding structure would bring substantial relief to foodbanks and would also encourage improved monitoring and evaluation across the board.
**Background**

This report is an attempt to understand one aspect of the devolved social fund in England better: local welfare assistance schemes (LWAS).

LWAS are part of the emergency safety net beneath the safety net, designed to support people who fall through the cracks of the social security system. It is therefore essential that it functions as intended. Foodbanks are not designed to be a long-term solution to poverty and must not become an alternative to a properly functioning safety net.

In 2013, following The Welfare Reform Act 2012, the discretionary social fund was abolished and the bulk of emergency welfare support was devolved to local authorities, in England, with the aim of being more tailored and targeted to local need and a more efficient use of resources. This replacement funding was to be spent supporting local people in a financial crisis.

The Cities and Local Government Devolution Act 2016 has brought devolution once again into the political spotlight. Devolution of political power and responsibility has become increasingly prominent through, for example, directly elected mayors, combined authorities, city deals, and the Northern Powerhouse. It is vital to get to grips with the future of emergency welfare support at a local level, alongside local support services such as Universal Support, if people who experience a crisis are going to be able to access the support needed to get back on their feet.

The 2016 National Audit Office report into Local welfare provision reported limited data on Local Welfare Assistance Schemes. Our 2014 report Emergency Use Only (with Oxfam, Child Poverty Actin Group (CPAG), and the Church of England) also highlighted the need for a better understanding of emergency welfare and how access and availability can be improved. Academic research has also identified a correlation between local authority spending cuts and numbers of foodbank referrals. As yet, there has not been further monitoring or assessment of the changes brought about by the devolution of the social fund or the subsequent removal ring-fencing of the funds.

Initially funding for local welfare assistance schemes was ring-fenced but in 2015 the Department for Communities and Local Government announced that this funding would no longer be ring-fenced, despite increased cuts to local authority budgets generally meaning additional pressures on local authority budgets.

The devolution of responsibility as well as funds has led to a complex patchwork of service provision, including a variety of names to match the variety of schemes being delivered. To some extent this can explain some of the confusion around availability and access, which has been very unhelpful for people and services affected when making such a change to the way the social security system is delivered. Excellent work has been conducted by the Children’s Society and CPAG around research, mapping and supporting access to LWAS via online tools. Since then, several foodbanks have expressed concerns about the future of their local welfare assistance schemes, their relationship with their local authority, and what changes might mean for the people they are serving as well as the foodbanks’ ability to meet local need. Often foodbanks do not know what support will be available the following year and therefore regular communication with their local council is crucial.

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Liaison between foodbanks and local authorities in terms of service provision frequently runs alongside engagement around policy development which could inform future service design and delivery.
Methodology

Foodbanks and local authorities in England were contacted to find out more about their experience of local welfare assistance schemes in order to map provision and share best practice.

The first round of quantitative surveys were sent to local authorities in England where a Trussell Trust foodbank was based, after identifying whether a Trussell Trust foodbank was based in their area and identifying who at the council was best to approach. The survey was then sent to all other local authorities in England. A reminder email was sent out to local authorities if a response had not been received initially. We received a higher proportion of responses from Councils that had a Trussell Trust foodbank based in their area.

There were formal responses relating to 74 local authorities, representing areas that host over a quarter of the foodbanks in the network as well as areas where Trussell Trust Foodbanks are not based.

39 (11%) local authorities in England submitted data via our survey. These local authorities host over 22% of Trussell Trust foodbanks. Survey respondents represented 25% of Unitary Authorities, 25% of Metropolitan Boroughs, 19% of County Councils, 16% of London Boroughs and 2% of District Councils. This is not a representative sample but exemplifies some of the experiences of local authorities in different areas of England. This may also over-represent local authorities who feel more confident about delivering and monitoring their schemes.

This report analyses qualitative data from over 77 (24%) foodbanks in the Trussell Trust England Network, alongside the responses from 21% local authorities in England.
**Introduction**

Foodbanks in The Trussell Trust network engage with their local authorities in a variety of ways including grant funding, provision in kind, operational support or advocacy. Local welfare schemes are often an area of policy and service delivery where foodbank work overlaps with local authority work. Many local welfare schemes have been interacting effectively with the work of foodbanks but other local arrangements could be improved. One foodbank recounted how they ‘find our local welfare scheme very helpful. When they first opened, a member of the team came to the foodbank to introduce themselves and talked me through their remit.’

However, lack of clarity about future local government funding has meant that councils were initially very careful about giving out funds that they may have needed to rely on in future years and budget underspends in the first year were initially misinterpreted as evidence of a lack of need.

Additionally, in some cases, schemes that have worked well in the past have been stopped, while the future of other schemes are precarious and funding is often only allocated on an annual basis. Diminution and expiry of crisis funds is a concern for foodbanks.

One foodbank reported a grant from their council in relation to the Local Social Fund for the years 2013, 2014 & 2015 but had nothing last year. Another foodbank reported that their council had a dedicated crisis support worker but her future was uncertain.

This uncertainty can present significant challenges for foodbanks. Engagement with local authorities varies from foodbank to foodbank. Some are involved with council policy development or working groups and advocacy; some develop practical working relationships around service delivery; and some do not have much communication at all. There are many examples of effective working relationships between foodbanks and their local authorities that we can learn from, and build on, through sharing best practice.

Building on previous work done by the Children’s Society and National Audit Office, this research contributes to work being done to engage with, monitor and evaluate, and build a clearer picture of local welfare provision. The Trussell Trust hopes the findings in this report will highlight good practice and identify areas where improvements can be made. The Trussell Trust hopes to inspire the sharing of learning and uptake of best practice among foodbanks and local authorities.

While it is important to be aware that what works in some areas may not be suitable for, or possible in, other areas, this report makes clear that there are many opportunities for learning from experience across the country and The Trussell Trust hopes this report will support knowledge-sharing to enable evidence-based policy development.
I. Who Provides Local Welfare Assistance Schemes

Knowledge about the delivery and impact of local welfare provision is patchy. Due to a lack of reporting requirements, knowledge tends to remain localised. However, even at a local level awareness about local welfare provisions could be improved.

The complex structure of local authorities in England, with some areas having a two-tier system and others a single tier system, has contributed to the complex nature of welfare provision. This does present increased flexibility around provision, however the lack of guidance that has accompanied the devolution of emergency welfare provisions seems to be hindering the ability of local welfare schemes nationally to develop long-term sustainable support that is appropriate and tailored to a local context.

Local authorities are being innovative and flexible in their approach to supporting local people who end up in a financial crisis, and are doing this whilst managing smaller budgets and increasing responsibilities. The constraints in resources faced by local authorities mean it is even more important that meaningful and standardised impact assessments of local welfare provision are conducted to ensure efficiency and to support service development.

The situation in six counties exemplifies the variety of ways in which local authorities have responded:

1) In Worcestershire the local welfare assistance schemes are administered by the District Councils.

2) In Lancashire, the local welfare assistance schemes are administered by Lancashire County Council on behalf of 12 district councils. However Lancashire County Council now faces significant uncertainty around the future of its LWAS due to its budget being cut.

3) Dorset Council no longer administers local welfare assistance. This has been contracted to First Point, a Dorset-wide homelessness prevention service supported by the charity You Trust.

4) Northamptonshire County Council has not had any social welfare scheme in at least the last two years. They had a project called the Sustaining Independent Living Scheme which focused on getting second hand goods to those who needed them, via an application form and assessment criteria. This was part of the bigger Social Fund pot which foodbanks were part of. The county council no longer have any contracts as funding has ceased.

5) A respondent from Woking Borough Council explained that the borough council does not operate the LWAS scheme: “Surrey County Council set one up via Citizens Advice using a card system which was abused so the local Citizens Advice reportedly stopped operating the process”, adding that the LWAS is now run by the local Citizens Advice.

6) In Somerset, the Local Assistance Scheme is dealt with by Somerset County Council. In West Somerset there is a Trussell Trust foodbank which is operated from the Baptist Church in Minehead and covers the district.

The majority of respondents to the local authority survey were Unitary Authorities, Metropolitan Boroughs and London Borough authorities. As the single-tier authorities

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5 http://theyoutrust.org.uk/
appear to be significantly over represented, this could suggest that it is easier for single-tier authorities to deliver, monitor and report on local welfare assistance scheme provision.

Of the local authorities who responded to our survey: 13% were upper tier and 11% were lower tier. Responses from upper tier authorities could explain some of the lack of lower tier responses where the LWAS schemes are delivered solely at the county level. District authorities in Kent, Worcestershire, Surrey, Somerset, and Devon referred us to their County Councils and District Councils. Wellingborough, Bassetlaw and Hambleton also directed us to their respective county councils:

A respondent on behalf of Spelthorne Council explained ‘The Local Welfare Assistance Scheme in Surrey is run by Surrey County Council as opposed to the Local Authority so therefore you need to redirect your survey to them as we are unable to answer your questions’.

Crawley Council also apologised for being unable to fill in the survey and directed us to a county council colleague, adding that ‘the situation here in Crawley is difficult to reflect in the questions that you have asked from the Borough Council perspective. The Local Welfare Assistance Network in Crawley is funded by West Sussex County Council primarily through Crawley Open House, West Sussex Children and Family Services and CAB – therefore I am unable to provide a figure of the level of funding as none of these are local housing authority/council run’.

![Tier of Survey Respondents](image)

**Figure 1**

Responses from local authorities suggest significant structural variation in administration, funding, delivery, and adaptation to local situations. In some areas responsibility appears to have been increasingly devolved from county councils downwards and in other areas responsibility for provision and delivery has been retained at the county level.

Foodbanks engage with a number of their local council’s departments and services and are well-placed to engage with local welfare policy and service provision. For example, this comment from Hammersmith & Fulham Foodbank illustrates this relationship:

Hammersmith & Fulham Foodbank works very closely with their Local Support Payments (LSP) team and has an excellent relationship with them. They are a tri-borough service with Kensington & Chelsea and Westminster Boroughs.
Hammersmith & Fulham Foodbank have recently taken over Kensington & Chelsea clients referred from the LSP team.

Foodbank feedback and local authority responses point to the fact that where councils have not responded, it could be due to the scheme no longer running or that the scheme has been contracted out (the former appears to be more likely). One local authority who did not fill in the survey explained that their County Council ‘no longer administers local welfare assistance. This has been contracted to First Point.’

In some cases contracting has worked well but in other areas it has been less successful, which will be discussed in the section on delivery.
II. Supporting local people

Foodbank data highlights that the need for emergency welfare support is increasing\(^6\). Anecdotal data from, and research\(^7\) conducted by and with\(^8\), the foodbank network tells a similar story.

Local authorities have also identified a high level of need for welfare support through delivering and developing their services. Methods of responses from local authorities have varied. Most local authorities had an out-of-office response and some had email addresses specifically to deal with welfare-related enquiries. Both of these measures reflect an identified, and significant, volume of enquiries regarding welfare support.

The current economic climate, specifically price rises and inflation, also adds uncertainty around the future numbers of people who may end up in a crisis and need emergency support.

**Identifying Need:**
Local authorities use a variety of monitoring techniques for monitoring applications and uptake. Some local had authorities been measuring the number of applications, others had measured the number of awards made and some had recorded both data sets. Some local authorities had exact numbers and others gave approximations.

One respondent explained that ‘while we record the details of applicants who receive awards, we only extract the number of awards made on a regular basis. This is because applicants can possibly apply on more than one occasion in a rolling 12 month period. More time [would be] needed for this’.

Among the local authorities who responded, over 50,308 people were helped by local welfare assistance programmes last year and at least 4,204 additional applications were received (it was not confirmed how many of these additional applications were successful). A low response rate suggests that overall this is a conservative estimate of the number of people applying for and receiving local welfare assistance provision across England.

For some respondents, the data was not available at all. In cases where no figure was given this included reasons such as the scheme no longer being operational. The numbers of people helped by the local authorities who responded demonstrates that a significant need for local welfare assistance exists.

**Meeting the Need:**
Local authorities have been given the freedom and responsibility to decide how best to provide tailored targeted support to local people in crisis. This brings opportunities, as local authorities are well-placed to understand and react to local economic and social contexts, including; developing locally tailored and suitable support services, potentially allowing for more flexibility in the system due to proximity, and being adaptable to change. However, these opportunities can only be realised or sustainable when challenges such as lack of resources, lack of guidance/advice/bench marking, lack of monitoring and evaluation and the ability to plan long-term are overcome.

Seventy-three percent of respondents entered comparable data for the last year’s LWAS spending and for the number of people who received support. A cursory estimate of the

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\(^7\) [https://westcheshire.foodbank.org.uk/2016/07/19/stillhungry-report/](https://westcheshire.foodbank.org.uk/2016/07/19/stillhungry-report/)

average cost per head of LWAS provision among respondents over the last year was calculated by comparing the number of people helped in the previous year to the amount of money spent. This gave a rough depiction of the variation in cost per head.

Looking at the available data, the average spend per head (2015-2016) appears to have been approximately £300.33, with the majority ranging between £52 and £780. Just under two thirds (63%) recorded spending which equated to under £300 a head and over 7% reported spending that equated to over £600 a head. These different costs do not take into account the different services being provided.

Unitary Authorities appear to spend the least per head and this could be due to improved efficiencies and cooperation experienced by unitary authorities. The observation that city and borough councils appear to spend less per head than county or district councils may reflect more available, or cheaper, transport links in those areas or it may represent economies of scale.

Due to the unique delivery systems used by each local authority (including variety in the methods of provision, funding, infrastructure and local contexts) this simple, direct comparison is mainly symbolic, and mostly serves to highlight the need for a more sustained and detailed analysis of the impact and effectiveness of LWAS. It is not yet clear whether the variation in structure, spending, and delivery is actually reflective of need.

It is important to consider and assess these differences in their local context, to develop a substantive idea of how schemes are achieving results (this will be looked at further in the section about delivery), as well as which are more effective and why. This would enable a better understanding of whether improvements in funding allocation may enable local welfare schemes to improve their services and reach more people.

Spending less per head does not necessarily represent efficiency. It could instead mean that need is not being adequately met. Some foodbanks in the sample highlighted concerns about the use and allocation of funding, with regards to underspending.
A more detailed record and analysis of cost and type of service delivery compared to need and impact would enable a better understanding of what works at a local level and why. It would also support more constructive and progressive comparisons of whether similar issues are faced by people across the country, support sharing of knowledge, and help identify more appropriate methods of financing and delivering crisis support.
III. Funding and Spending

The devolution of the Social Fund, as well as the removal of the need to ring-fence funding, has meant that alongside wider budget cuts, many local authorities have struggled to maintain spending on local welfare assistance schemes.

Several foodbanks have expressed concerns about the future of their LWAS and what it would mean for the people they are serving. Often foodbanks do not know what will be available the following year and therefore regular communication with their local council is important.

One foodbank noted: ‘We have had a grant from [the] council in relation to the Local Social Fund for the years 2013, 2014 & 2015 but we have had nothing this year.’

Another, who has regular contact with their City Council via two of their four customer service centres, explained: ‘Sadly due to their significant budget cuts the council have reduced their customer service centres from 12 to 4 in the last 2 years plus having one centre specialising in housing/homelessness issues’.

The insecurity around future LWAS provision is an annual concern for foodbanks and the communities they serve. A more secure and long-term funding structure would bring substantial relief and would also encourage improved monitoring and evaluation across the board.

The local government finance settlement could go a significant way to addressing and enabling a fairer distribution, and protection, of resources by providing both a longer-term strategy and budget, as well as protection of LWAS funding.

There was a small increase in spending by local authorities in the second year of implementation, however there was a large drop in spending in the year following the announcement that funding was no longer ring-fenced. The continued rise in referrals to The Trussell Trust foodbank network for emergency food and support since 2015 would suggest that the decrease in spending is not due to a decrease in need. Since the ring-fencing on funding was removed, a number of foodbanks have reported concern about lack of clarity about the future of local welfare provision in their area.

Some local authorities seem to be struggling with increased challenges around local welfare provision more than others. Almost half, 49%, of respondents said that they had spent all of their allocated funding last year.

The majority of upper tier, lower tier and London Borough authorities had exhausted their budgets for 2015/16. However, the majority of Unitary Authorities and Metropolitan Boroughs had not spent that whole of their budgets. The difference in spending patterns may be due to:
- regional variation in need and cost of living across England
- ability of provider to procure in bulk and work on efficiencies of scale
- variation in budget allocation
- variation in the tier of authority responsible
- other services available
- trying to conserve funds for following year(s)
One local authority explained that spend was dependent on circumstances, as their criteria was that it must be an emergency or ensure future resilience for clients. This demonstrates that extent and impact of the local welfare schemes depend on eligibility criteria. Eligibility criteria can range from broad groups of ‘all citizens in crisis’ to narrow specifications, such as ‘recipients must be in fuel poverty or resettling and in need of essential household items’.

There is a complex picture of LWAS funding by authorities in different regions across England. It shows that following the significant reduction in funding between 2014/2015 and 2015/16, reductions appear less severe overall in 2016/17. This may reflect an active attempt by a significant numbers of councils to do what they could to maintain or, in some cases, increase funding.

There are clear differences in budgets by region, as shown in Figure 4. For example, the North West has one of the smaller budgets despite the ONS record that ‘28 towns and cities with the largest percentage of deprived areas were in the north or midlands of England’.

There were smaller differences in spending by different region in the 2015-16 financial year than there had been in the first two years. However, the gap seems to be increasing in the last financial year.

Although interesting to track changes at a regional level, as shown in Figure 5, it is important to note that a regional perspective does mask discrepancies among local authorities within the regions and therefore does not reveal the full extent of the current postcode lottery around local welfare provision. For example:

The significant increase in spending by Coventry City Council masks a decrease by other local authorities in the West Midlands in 2016/17. Similarly, in Yorkshire and the Humber, an increase by one upper tier authority skews the overall spending to appear as an increase while another, lower tier authority saw a decrease in funding for LWAS provision. Additionally, a number of London boroughs increased their funding last year, but this increase was not across the board.

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Figure 3

Trends in average spend by survey respondents

![Graph showing trends in average spend by survey respondents.](image)

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https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/housing/articles/townsandcitiesanalysisenglandandwalesmarch2016/2016-03-18
Figure 4

It is not surprising that upper tier councils would need a bigger budget than a lower tier council, as they cover bigger geographical areas. However, the majority of lower tier councils provided no detail about spending, making comparisons more difficult.

Findings also suggest that spending among London Boroughs and MBCs are similar. Looking at spending by tier of authority shows that upper tier authorities have much higher spending that lower tier or unitary authorities. However, when looking at spending per head, by authority, there was not the same difference in spending.

Figure 5

The low expenditure of unitary authorities is an interesting finding, which could suggest an increased ability for unitary authorities to make efficiency savings. Lower tier authorities appear to spend more per head than upper tier authorities but their overall budget was smaller.
Unitary authorities had smaller budgets and spent less per head, which could be due to:
  a) The type of scheme delivered
  b) Efficiency of scheme
  c) Cost of living

Almost two thirds (65%) of respondents also shared some detail about how their previous year’s budget was spent. Thirteen percent of respondents reported no funds for local welfare assistance provision since April 2015. This experience resonates with a number of foodbanks’ concerns that the available state social security provision is not meeting need.

One council explained that ‘there was an additional contingency fund that was not needed. 7% of the budget was used for research into ways to sustain the scheme going forward.’ Another council explained that a ‘majority of funding is used to fund charity sector support/engagement around welfare benefit advice, debt advice, money management skills’.

A couple of councils reported that their LWAS funding was still ring-fenced and would be for a number of years to come. One council recorded ‘we are spending a ring-fenced budget using unspent monies from funding we received in 2013/14 and 2014/15’.
Where respondents did not enter a breakdown, this was because: data was not available, not accessible, or there had been no budget at all that year.

Allocating targeted support:
Local authorities who still had LWAS budgets prioritised spending in different ways. Most local authorities spent the majority of their funding on direct provisions and many have also allocated some money to administering their programmes.

One local authority who had not entered data explained that ‘the council doesn’t have a set budget for each year. Funding has been carried forward each year and the budget has to fund the scheme for a number of years to come.’

Of the comparable data, 25% of respondents recorded spending 100% of the budget on provisions for LWAS claimants. 67% had allocated over two thirds of the budget directly to provisions.

On average 17% was spent on admin and 77% was spent on provision for LWAS claimants. This direct provision could be administered in different forms, e.g. grant or provisions in kind, and will be discussed later, in the section about delivery. Some had allocated part of the budget to be spent in other ways. For example:

One council reported 1.9% going to ‘a foodbank for first stage delivery in their area’ and noted that Q1,4+7 don’t really take into account underspend from previous year and VAT reclaim on white goods.

This research demonstrates that foodbanks and local authorities can, and do, work together to understand need in order to develop service provision.
Local authorities were similarly investing funding to address the underlying causes of people’s financial crises and into making LWAS more sustainable in future:

One council explained that they spent less than a third on admin or direct provision as the ‘majority of funding is used to fund charity sector support/engagement around welfare benefit advice, debt advice, money management skills’.
Another explained that there had been ‘an additional contingency fund that was not needed’ but a percentage of their budget had been ‘used for research into ways to sustain the scheme going forward’.

With further research, monitoring and evaluation, more appropriate, effective and efficient services can be developed and delivered.
IV. Eligibility, Accessibility and Availability

The flexibility and adaptiveness of local authorities is also evident in the varying eligibility criteria for LWAS and in the sorts of services available.

Although most eligibility criteria are fairly narrow, due to the nature of LWAS as the safety net under the safety net, many councils have built some necessary flexibility into their assessment process to ensure people in crisis are caught by the safety net of their LWAS. Eighty-one percent of respondents said that they provided local welfare assistance to ‘people in receipt of benefits’, 70% provided local welfare assistance to ‘people awaiting benefits’, and 59% provided it to ‘people whose benefits have been stopped or have been sanctioned’.

Fifty-four percent of respondents detailed specific eligibility criteria. More stringent criteria could reflect areas with: smaller budgets, higher insecurity or uncertainty about future funds, other priorities for budget, or particularly high levels of need.

Among survey respondents, the most common criteria were:
- Being a local resident/householder
- Dependent on need/circumstances/case on its own merits
- All citizens in crisis/anyone in need/anyone vulnerable
- Anyone in an emergency situation will be considered
- Working on a low income/ low income and no savings
- People experiencing financial crisis/destitution

Respondents tended to advise visiting the website to see the full details of eligibility criteria. The range between narrowness and flexibility of criteria was significant. The number of criteria required for qualification for a particular scheme also varied. Some local authorities used multiple, specific criteria and others used one or two, more general principles. Other examples include:
- Age limits
- Exceptions for some armed forces
- If someone’s situation poses a serious health risk to themselves or their families

There can also be restrictions on how many applications one person can make in a set period of time. A council and a foodbank in different areas reported a limit to one application in a year. One foodbank also raised a question about the adequacy of the grants given out. Interestingly foodbanks in the same area reported different experiences of their LWAS, which to some extent reflects their different relationships with local authorities.

In one local authority area one foodbank was receiving money from the LWAS that covered their warehousing costs while another foodbank under the same county council identified a lack of engagement and clarity about services available.

However, another local authority successfully engaged with all the Trussell Trust foodbanks in its area under a coordinated LWAS scheme. This emphasises the important of knowledge-sharing locally and across regions to develop better working relationships that support improved delivery, and availability, of emergency welfare assistance.

Where foodbanks reported less developed relationships or had noticed some difficulties with their councils current delivery of LWAS, we tended to receive fewer council responses compared to areas where foodbanks had reported positive relationships. This, to some extent reflects a lack of current engagement between the local authority and foodbanks but could also reflect a council struggling to deliver, or monitor, LWAS.
One local authority explained ‘sometimes benefits are sanctioned through no fault of the recipient, or they are currently appealing a sanction. In these instances often they meet other thresholds.’ A local authority that awards LWAS depending on circumstances also requires that the support given ‘must be emergency or ensure future resilience for clients’.

Eligibility criteria are also adaptable, according to changes in local circumstances, which is welcome, however, some basic benchmarking could help reduce some of the effects of a postcode lottery.

The range of eligibility, and in many cases ineligibility, criteria makes national-scale monitoring, evaluation, and comparison currently complicated. A localised approach can make support more targeted and appropriate. To understand to what extent this might be the case, more research is needed, and generic standards need to be created to benchmark LWAS effectiveness in meeting local needs.
V. Delivery

Foodbanks’ experiences of local welfare schemes have been mixed. Some noted very positive and productive programmes, such as:

**Anonymous Foodbank**

“Senior Money Matters Advisor for The Cambridge Housing Society and organises regular meetings of agencies and local authority to share information and look at new initiatives. Cambridgeshire County Council runs the Cambridgeshire Local Assistance Scheme (CLAS).

“The present scheme provides white goods, beds, food vouchers, clothes vouchers and utility vouchers through a network of ‘Authorised Agents’ who apply online to CHARIS who are delivering the scheme for CCC. The items are then delivered to the home of the client.

*It is an excellent scheme and has helped a huge number of vulnerable people in crisis.*”

Some foodbanks have identified less successful projects and a few struggled to identify significant local welfare support by their council for a variety of reasons, such as:

**Stamford Foodbank**

“We are increasing the range of services we provide to foodbank clients as there is no other provision in South Lincolnshire that we have come across apart from the charity sector getting directly engaged. The LWAS in Lincolnshire seems to have ceased to exist and we are having to provide the assistance that would have come previously via Job Centres etc.

“Our Foodbank has a project to supply household goods (white goods, beds, etc.) to voucher holders and also has a fund for fuel vouchers as there is a gap in local provision. We are in a cross border area with three other county council borders within 2 miles of our Town centre. (Rutland, Cambridgeshire and Northamptonshire) The disparity between these areas is incredible.

*Rutland probably has one of the best Schemes and a dedicated in House team of staff supporting it.*”

Naturally, some foodbanks had experience of both positive and negative systems of LWAS delivery over time, such as:

**Anonymous Foodbank**

“We have long since had misgivings about our Local Welfare Provision and how they may be using us before exhausting their own liabilities.

“We have struggled in the past to arrange meetings but they have always been very courteous and productive once we got together. We had an excellent relationship with the team in LWP despite them using us, possibly too often. They would always call us first, in response to my emails, if someone needed more than 3 vouchers.

“However, there have been some staffing changes and so we have lost some of our good contacts.”
Where LWAS is provided, delivery methods vary among local authorities and the operation of schemes vary substantially, beyond the differences in their titles. The differing names of schemes, compared to what was known nationally as the Social Fund, could be a reason for lack of awareness about local welfare assistance provision.

The extent of welfare provision may depend on which type of authority which is delivery the programme. A significant proportion of schemes are currently council run and some are run in partnership with local organisations such as charities. A number of foodbanks are also part of wider Local Assistance Networks, developed by their authorities. For example, one foodbank welcomed their local county council’s ‘dedicated Crisis Support worker, who manages the old Crisis loan budget and emergency support.’

**Figure 6**

The majority of councils who filled in the survey run their own schemes. Some were delivered by multiple partners. One added that while the scheme was council funded, it was run by a firm that won a contract, working in partnership with local charities.

One local authority who explained that ‘the administration of the LAF is contracted out explained that charities/frontline council teams are part of the delivery - helping applicants/submitting applications. Council oversee day to day management of scheme. The Customer Service Centre does an initial eligibility check’.

Other examples of contracted out services experienced by foodbanks:

**Horsham**

“In West Sussex the Social Fund work is contracted out to organisations which already support those in need and in Horsham the bulk of that funding comes to Horsham Matters. The foodbank provides furniture and household goods, white goods new or second hand, and emergency fuel top-ups to people in crisis, as well as provision through the foodbank. This has been done since the charity was established in 2008, before they were funded to do so, and before we set up the foodbank. They work closely with both the District and County Councils.”
Doncaster
Another LWAS operation is contracted out by the Council to a company called Northgate, which also runs the Welsh Government’s LWAS equivalent. There appears to be a large number of ‘rejected’ applications to the Local Assistance Scheme. This issue is highlighted in the report (see Appendix) which confirms that 1429 applicants were refused in 2015/16. "For the year 2016/17 the charge for Northgate to provide a fully managed Scheme for Doncaster is £99,711.00. For the year 2015/16 a total of 532 applications were approved for support. The 532 paid applications totalled £265,382.60 and this was made up of a combination of household/white goods and cash payments for food, utility top-ups and emergency travel. When an application for support is made the applicant is asked to provide information about themselves, their circumstances and the nature of their emergency/crisis. The answers to the questions are used to build a ‘picture’ about the applicant and score the application. If an applicant’s score meets the eligibility threshold set by Doncaster Council then they are provided with support (provided they have not had an award in the previous 12 months). Therefore there is not usually one single reason for approval of an application as a number of factors are considered. In relation to ‘alternative support’; the main form of alternative support is signposting applicants to other support organisations where appropriate. In respect of the future of the scheme from 2017 onwards, this hasn’t yet been agreed and will be considered alongside other welfare payments made.”

The cost per head of the actual service provision in Doncaster is £499, which is higher than the average cost per head of survey respondents, and there is an additional administrative cost. Evaluation of the delivery and impact of this service provisions would help to understand whether this is value for money and people are receiving the help they need.

Foodbanks who have good relationships, and regular communication, with their local authorities, have reported how being kept up to date with possible changes in local schemes has been helpful. This may mean they have to prepare for an increase in referrals if their local scheme were to stop.

Examples that have been shared with us by respondents from councils during the research process are:

**Anonymous Foodbank**
We work closely with our Council and are part of the Community Assistance Scheme that was set up. We have monthly CAS meetings with the main partners which is a brilliant way to find out what is going on and to keep in touch with developments. The partners who attend are from Citizens Advice, the Job Centre, the City Council, a Credit Union, other local charities and the Foodbank.

**Oldham Foodbank**
“Oldham MBC has a ring fenced LWP scheme using the reduced post 2013 Government allocation following the ending of the Crisis Loan Scheme. As part of the scheme people are referred to Oldham Foodbank by LWP, where that need is identified. Reciprocally we refer people for LWP assistance.

In Oldham it is an online application and we assist people to apply using our computers in the foodbank. Details of the Oldham scheme are on: [http://www.oldham.gov.uk/info/200737/welfare_reform/1172/about_local_welfare_provision?acceptCookieContinue=Continue](http://www.oldham.gov.uk/info/200737/welfare_reform/1172/about_local_welfare_provision?acceptCookieContinue=Continue). We do have a good relationship with the team and they also support us with food donations.”
Another foodbank explained that ‘The local Welfare Support Scheme has supported us for the last three years with a contribution of £5000 per annum, which effectively funds our warehousing costs.’

Councils' engagement with local foodbanks

- Refer to foodbank before LWA provision: 10%
- Refer to foodbank during/as part of LWA provision: 31%
- Refer to foodbank after LWA provision: 35%
- Sign post to foodbank: 20%
- Do not refer or signpost at all: 4%

Figure 7

Coventry Foodbank
The LWAS in Coventry is the Community Grant Scheme. This is where the DWP money went from the previous Crisis Loan scheme. Coventry foodbank does not partner with the CGS in term so of receiving funding for the provision of food support, but CGS will write a red voucher if the client fails the application process.

In addition to referring people directly to foodbanks, 35% of survey respondents signpost people to foodbanks. However, these referrals are sometimes the only engagement foodbanks have with their local welfare schemes.

Previous research has highlighted difficulties around availability and accessibility of LWAS schemes and this still seems to be an area requiring improvement. A handful of foodbanks were not aware of their local welfare assistance schemes and a number were not clear about what they involved. This could be due to the variety of administrative procedure used by local authorities relating to local welfare assistance schemes.

There was also a lack of clarity among some councils about where queries relating to availability of LWAS provision, and data relating to it, should be directed. A handful of local authorities processed the survey as a Freedom of Information request.

One foodbank noted that ‘we are not aware that our local council is in a position to help people in this way. Certainly, to our knowledge, they have not been in a position to offer assistance in recent years. There have been massive cuts and sweeping changes in our local council departments in Liskeard with many essential services being 'centralised' away from our area.’

http://www.coventry.gov.uk/info/54/benefits/1774/community_support_grant
While many local welfare schemes have interacted effectively with the work of foodbanks, other local arrangements have been less successful. Additionally, in some cases, schemes that have worked well in the past are being stopped. This presents increasing challenges for foodbanks.

**Northampton County Council**

*Since the closure of the Social Fund we do not fund any food banks directly or emergency provision. The only contract we hold is for VIN (Voluntary Impact Northampton). The Northamptonshire Community Foundation may also have given grant funding to food banks. I don’t believe we have a local welfare assistance scheme other than the usual Social Services processes.*

**Dorking Foodbank**

Surrey County Council scheme will cover quite a few of the local TT foodbanks. As is probably common, applications are made on line. The local Citizens Advice can help those who need assistance with the on-line application, and in some cases applications can be made directly by telephone. The CA said the SCC LAS has also funded payments for fuel for some clients on prepayment meters. Some essential white goods may also be provided. No funds are available from central government, the Surrey LAS scheme is funded by SCC. The local CA say “We find the scheme an essential resource for some of our clients who are in financial crisis.”

Another foodbank noted *‘I have recently found a few issues with the Local Emergency Support team (they supply vouchers via a phone conversation and then post them out to the clients).’* 

Several foodbanks noted that the LWAS was being administered by their local Citizens Advice, as exemplified by Woking Borough Council’s response (under *I: Who Provides Local Welfare Assistance Schemes*).

![Local Welfare Support Available](image)

**Figure 8**

Local authorities who recorded providing support in kind were asked to expand on what these services were. The top three areas were provision of goods:

1. Bedding, furniture and carpet
2. White goods, cooking utensils and crockery
3. Pre-paid cards or vouchers for essentials and utilities
Foodbank vouchers, referrals and other advice or service provision are also often provided. One local authority also reported providing clothing and another highlighted its food delivery service. ‘Services’, such as those run by Rutland County Council can include a dedicated crisis support worker.

Below are three examples of schemes, run by different tiers of local authorities.

**Mid Devon District Council Scheme**
“We pay for furniture via local charities, we help clients to access grants, foodbank vouchers, fuel vouchers via CHARIS, referral onto other relevant organisations, we offer free debt and money advice, signposting to other schemes.”

**Warwickshire County Council Local Welfare Scheme**
“The grant scheme comprises two elements, one for Immediate Need and one for Planned Need. Brief details for each element are:
• **Immediate Need** is to assist applicants who are in an emergency or crisis, have no access to funds and no other agencies will provide help. Support is given in the form of food vouchers and credit for electricity or gas top-ups or providing basic equipment such as kettle/toaster, bed and bedding.
• **Planned Need** support is given to eligible applicants by providing a limited range of essential household items that cannot be provided by any other agency, for example: domestic appliances (kettle, toaster, fridge, washing machine, combination microwave/mini-oven) dining table and chairs, basic kitchen equipment (utensils, cutlery, crockery, pots & pans, tea towels), bed and bedding, chest of drawers/wardrobe and bath towels”

**Rochdale Borough Council**
“The Council’s scheme doesn’t provide loans or grants. White goods and essential household items are provided for those resettling and emergency energy vouchers are provided for those requiring emergency household fuel. Small amounts of money are given via PayPoint credit for emergency/crisis situations. The Council also grant funded contributions to a number of food banks in the area (including one Trussell Trust food bank) and a number of small community based projects.”

It would be interesting to investigate further (with monitoring and evaluation in place) the difference of the schemes impact when provision is in the form of a grant rather than a loan and to also consider the sustainability of the scheme in the two circumstances.

Signposting is a major part of local authority responses to emergency welfare enquiries and forms a large part of the advice given by many local authorities on their websites. However, as LWAS receives different levels of resourcing and is prioritised differently in different areas of England, people in some areas of the country may have to wait longer than in other areas to progress enquiries about financial hardship.

The minimum time that a local authority said they would ‘aim to provide a response’ was within 24 hours. The majority said to expect a response within three to ten working days but a handful said 14 days or did not give a time limit. Most directed people to the council’s website for more information, for example:

• Get information about Council Tax; Council Tax Support and Benefits
• Register for e-Billing and view your Council Tax, Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support details on-line
• Report a Change of Circumstances / Change of Address for Benefits
• Work out your Benefit and Council Tax Support on-line
For free and confidential debt and money advice via Step Change Debt Charity or call 0800 138 1111, Money Advice Service, Moneywise, Citizens’ Advice, Community Advice & Law Centre

One local authority specifically mentioned food in their response time to enquiries: ‘Food vouchers/emergency living expenses would be replied to within 24 hours. Enquiries relating to deposit and/or rent in advance, would be replied to within 2 working days and other queries would be addressed within 10 working days.’

Online applications can be useful, and speed up processing times. However it is important, when considering accessibility of schemes, to remain aware about the limitations on people’s ability to ‘engage with the system’. Many people who are served by foodbanks in The Trussell Trust Network have trouble using or accessing the internet. Digital poverty can be material (someone may not have a computer or be able to afford access to the internet) and it may also exist in terms of skills (someone not knowing how to use a computer or the internet). Additionally, hindrances such as navigability of council websites and needing to log-in to access information may mean help is not as easily accessible as it could be. It is therefore important that local welfare accessibility is prioritised as well as availability.

With the continued roll out of Universal Credit, the development and sustainability of LWAS will need to be a top priority. The Local Assistance Networks that have been developed in some areas may feed into this research and development. Universal Support could learn from and build on the work of these networks and include this sort of service provision in its remit.

Foodbanks in The Trussell Trust network are keen to interact with Local Welfare provision and the flow of people between local authorities and foodbanks is two-way, as foodbanks also signpost to local schemes that they are aware of. The following example shows how foodbanks and local authorities can build relationships that enable them to work together to address research and development requirements:

_Epsom & Ewell Foodbank “has 5 members coming from the LAS Surrey to spend some time in our foodbank over 3 different sessions as they wanted to see and experience things from the other side! The Deputy Manager visited so that they could talk in greater depth etc. Their funding is a little different in that the bulk comes from the profit made by the Surrey County Council Business section, where the head made a commitment to see the profit go to help people via this scheme.”_
Conclusion

Local welfare assistance provision is vital and needs to exist. There are many very positive examples of LWAS providing emergency support to people in crisis locally.

However, our research suggests that the future of LWAS needs to be much more strategic to prevent many thousands of people falling into destitution. To do this, better monitoring and evaluation of current and past provision is needed. Even projects that are currently running well tend to be in a financially insecure position.

Many Trussell Trust foodbanks are building constructive relationships with local authorities to ensure people can access support in a crisis and to help inform policy change that will reduce the numbers of people ending up in difficulty in the first place. Foodbanks do not want to become a permanent feature of the social security system but they are aware that local welfare funding and provision is something that councils are grappling with and are keen for a dialogue to be maintained.

As a significant amount of schemes are contracted out, it could be useful to have guidelines in place for contractors around monitoring and evaluation.

There is much to be gained by tailoring services to make them locally appropriate, however regular research needs to be undertaken to make sure that services remain suitable and relevant. Additionally, budgets need to be secure and available to make meaningful, long-term development and delivery plans.

It would also be beneficial to have nationwide benchmarking and guidelines for services that are designed and delivered in a way the best meets local need. Meeting necessary standards, adapting to external pressures, such as changing need, is much more difficult without careful and regular monitoring and evaluation of needs and services. Being able to plan for the future, becoming sustainable, and working to reduce the time people spend in a financial crisis all require concerted investment in the monitoring and evaluation of services.
Recommendations

The findings suggest that there are a number of ways that, across the UK, improvements can be made to the economic and social well-being of people who hit a financial crisis through increased knowledge sharing to develop tailored, local solutions; supported by longer-term strategy and budgets; underpinned by enhanced research and development practices.

Short-term

- Sharing of learning and good practice among public, private, and voluntary service providers via Local Government Association coordinated database to support efforts to monitor and evaluate service delivery and improve research and development.
- Increased engagement of local authorities with foodbanks around local welfare policy and service delivery.
- More clearly defined, and widely used, principles for eligibility.
- Benchmarked guidance and requirements for Monitoring & Evaluating local welfare schemes.

Medium-term

- Clearer strategy/guidelines from DCLG for coordinated monitoring and evaluation to ensure that services are delivered in a tailored way that is appropriate to local need but also so that receiving LWAS is not a postcode lottery.
- Benchmarked guidelines, agreements and measurements for companies contracted to run/deliver LWAS.
- LWAS funding should become officially ring-fenced again.
- Enhanced research and development around emergency welfare provision more widely.

Long-term

- Monitoring & evaluation of LWAS schemes to be included in the annual devolution reports to parliament to inform development.
- Local Government Finance settlements should support budgeting for LWAS provision that extends beyond a year. This would support resourcing for, and encourage more of an interest in, monitoring and evaluating the impact of local welfare provision, which would in turn encourage long-term planning and support sustainability.
- Funding allocation for LWAS needs to be reassessed, following analysis of the impact of current schemes, to ensure the principle behind Localism is realised with more success.
- Interaction with Universal Support needs to be addressed, including assessment of, and clarity on, the role of Universal Support in LWAS.
Appendix:

Examples of websites, application forms, programme information

A. Lincolnshire Local Welfare Scheme

Lincolnshire County Council Benefits

Lincolnshire Community Assistance Scheme (LCAS)

Please note that as of 14th October 2016, the Lincolnshire Community Assistance Scheme is closed.

B. Gloucester

Gloucestershire County Council contracted out the administration of their Welfare Support Scheme to a company called Auriga. The sample of their offer is below:
C. Doncaster Local Welfare Scheme

Doncaster Foodbank have been informed of the following about their LWAS:

The overarching aim of the scheme is to assist the most vulnerable residents in meeting their need for support or to help people cope with special difficulties for eg: An emergency, A disaster, Where there is serious risk to the person or their families’ health and safety, Returning to the community after being in care, Staying in their own home rather than going into care, Leaving prison/young offender establishment, Easing exceptional pressure, Paying for certain travel expenses such as visiting someone who is ill or going to a family funeral

Only one award per year will be authorised.

Applicants can apply using an online form or can apply by telephone. The scheme is points-based and applicants have to meet an eligibility threshold score to be considered for an award. Successful awards are made either with a prepaid card to use at selected retailers or (in a limited number of circumstances) in cash via the Paypoint system. All awards are non-repayable.

When a call handler takes an applicant through the series of questions they also make a comprehensive note of everything the applicant says about their circumstances. There are two main reasons this is done:

* To ensure the applicant is given as many points as possible
* To identify where other support may be appropriate (whether the application is granted or not).

If an applicant is refused an award and there does not appear to be an organisation on the list that may assist them, the call handlers’ supervisor will contact the officer at Doncaster Council for further advice.

Awards are made if an applicant meets a point threshold. Applicants have to answer a number of questions about themselves and the circumstances of the crisis/emergency that they face and points are awarded depending on the answers submitted. If an applicant accumulates enough points to achieve the eligibility threshold then an award is made (providing no previous award has been made in the past year). Therefore if an applicant is unsuccessful it may be that they have not achieved enough points to be eligible or it may be that they have already had an award in the past year.'