

Surrey Local Assistance Scheme

Working with local partners to help people in crisis address their immediate and longer term needs

“Protecting vulnerable people is core to what we do, and over the last 18 months our local assistance scheme has given over £900,000 worth of vital crisis grants to Surrey families going through hard times.

“Our scheme has helped over 5,800 people out with everything from basics shopping and petrol to recycled furniture, and it also offers access to support services so families are less likely to rely on our help in future and we save taxpayers' money in the long run.

“We’ve worked closely with Citizens Advice, charities and other councils to make a real difference to Surrey families, and our officers behind the scheme got national recognition for their community work in the 2014 Peer Awards.”

Councillor Denise Le Gal, Surrey County Council’s Cabinet Member for Business Services

Summary of the scheme

- Claims are made by phone through Surrey CAB and other local advice and support providers, including Surrey Council social care teams and homelessness charities. Online applications will shortly open to the public.
- Available to anyone aged over 16 who lives in Surrey, or is intending to within the next 28 days, and cannot afford essentials.
- Applications are one-off but there is discretion to provide more.
- Instant decision on the phone during application.
- Monetary support provided via pre-paid cards with spending limited to particular categories of shop. The cards provided via CAB, a number of other organisations, or sent in the post by next day delivery.
- Furniture, white goods and household items via the Surrey Furniture Reuse network.
- Other help can include essential travel expenses and fuel prepayment cards top ups.

Key facts and figures

- Year one (2013-14)
 - 3349 applications in total and an 89 per cent acceptance rate.
 - 2100 card only awards granted.
 - 670 Surrey Reuse Network only awards granted.
 - 218 card and Surrey Reuse Network awards granted.

Making welfare work locally

- Year two (2014-15) to end September
 - 3050 applications in first six months, 93 per cent acceptance rate.
 - 2050 card only awards.
 - 590 Surrey Reuse Network only awards.
 - 180 card and Surrey Reuse Network awards.

Why Surrey's approach stood out

Surrey consulted early with a range of their local advice and service providers, keen to use their new responsibilities to provide a service that responded quickly to people in crisis, but that also ensured support to wider community services that would help them get to the source of the problem. As a partner, the CAB provided immediate access to the scheme and referred on to advice and support services in the community. The furniture reuse projects made efficient and ethical use of resources and were able to deliver items quickly, arrange fittings and collect and dispose of old items appropriately.

Project strengths

Planning and strategy

The council set up a planning group in 2011 made up of representatives of different council departments, housing associations, CAB and the Furniture reuse network.

They pooled their own knowledge and experience and used insight from research commissioned by the wider council welfare reform strategy group to understand the needs of the potential service users. This indepth research looked at the needs of residents and carried out interviews with a range of family types. They looked at how people were managing in the current financial climate, how they budgeted and considered the impact of welfare changes on the local authority services.

They set out their aims for the local assistance scheme, which were for the system to be more efficient than its predecessor and to get the right amount of money to as many people in need, as quickly and securely as possible. They were aware that although the perception of the county as a whole is that it is fairly wealthy, there are pockets of people in constrained financial circumstances both in and out of work. They also had high domestic violence rate. They wanted to help all residents who needed support, and were keen to ensure that their scheme was flexible to meet the needs of all potential users. They used a range of external research to help them decide how they could design an efficient system and decided on payment cards. They involved organisations that work with claimants on benefits to help design how the process would work and talked to other local authorities about their ideas.

“It's about trying to resolve the issue at source, not just giving a sticking plaster.”

Norah Lewis, Assistant Senior Manager, Commissioning, Adult Social Care

Making welfare work locally

The lead responsibility moved from adult social care to shared services but the committee continues to work together to monitor and evaluate how the scheme is working and make appropriate changes.

The scheme has had very positive feedback about the quality of the service from residents, particularly impressed with the speed of decisions. In September 2014, they also won a [Peer Award](#) in the category of 'Giving to the community' in recognition of their work to support residents in need.

Using the CAB and other partners as applications routes

From the outset the council were keen to involve the CAB to help ensure that people coming for crisis support were also able to be offered or referred easily to foodbanks, benefits or debt advice or budgeting support.

They also help with verification of the client's name, address, and circumstances. Following verification, the claim is made by the client. A decision is made instantly and the bureau adviser told. They are able to activate a prepayment card and give it there and then to the client.

Cards cannot be used to access cash and Surrey can monitor where the cards are used. Underspend can also be recouped.

“Working with the CAB means that we are able to address the wider issues that have led to a person's crisis ensuring they do not become dependent on the scheme.

“This approach brings in people to get more help in the longer term, such as benefits, debt and legal advice, or personal budgeting support. This helps to prevent the need from continuing. If we just give someone £25 for food, they will probably be in the same situation next week. Getting support from the CAB can help to alleviate their problems in the longer term.”

Will Rossetti, Local Assistance scheme Supervisor

“This project has been an excellent example of how residents have been able to benefit by a joined up approach with the statutory and voluntary sector co-delivering a service to achieve the best possible outcome for residents. Over 800 volunteers across the CAB network in Surrey have been involved in the project and value the scheme in the way it alleviates the crises people face while the CAB can continue to address their underlying problems.”

Jane Bourgeois, Manager of Walton, Weybridge and Hersham CAB

Making welfare work locally

Partnering with Surrey reuse network (SRN) to provide a fast, affordable and sustainable service

SRN is made up six projects that provide a full range of household furniture and white goods, both new and recycled. Using these projects both ensures a cheaper service and supports the council's sustainability aims. Most furniture and household items are reused but some white goods are new with costs kept down by bulk purchasing. In contrast to support that was available under the social fund, the service includes everything: the product, its delivery, installation and collection of old items.

Once an award for items has been approved, an automatic prompt is sent to the SRN which advises the appropriate project – usually the one closest to where the applicant lives. The resident is often contacted the same day and invited to visit and view or have a delivery sent to them with their old items collected.

“For SRN this has very much been about extending outreach deeper into the community and providing even more people with quality goods to sustain their homes. Reuse provides the best option to do this and keep on doing it.”

Adrian Collins, Project Manager, Kingston Community Furniture

Changing delivery to meet the demands and improve services

“We have designed and manage the scheme in a way that reflects the differing and unpredictable nature of the crises that we are dealing with, we need to be able to react to new information and new circumstance; and adapt the scheme appropriately.”

Will Rossetti, Local Assistance scheme Supervisor

The council collects a range of data to monitor use and measure the effectiveness of the scheme. This includes what items are given, how much money is awarded to whom and where the applicants live. For example, they are interested in who keeps coming back and which claims fail. This enables them to consider how they can ensure claimants take up offers of support. For example, where claimants have failed to take up advice appointments set up to deal with a debt or benefit problem, they make a new award conditional on taking up that appointment. Failed claims usually result from people being unable to meet the ID requirements. They've already used this information to review the design and administration of their scheme. They are trying to develop ways of developing ways of assessing how intervention has prevented longer term needs and indeed costs to services.

They have reviewed access to the scheme and found that routing claims via the CAB was effective in enabling referrals to other support services, but found it also limited access for some people. They have now extended access to a few family, homeless and furniture projects. They are shortly introducing online claims as Surrey libraries provide free access to all residents.

Making welfare work locally

They have kept the monetary amounts allocated for food under review and made changes to take account of research on needs and costs, for example of children of different ages.

Initial promotion was cautious to ensure that they could meet demand. They have distributed 20,000 leaflets via local organisations such as bureaux, housing associations, libraries and homeless shelters. Local Assistance staff gave presentations to more than 50 groups who work with people who might need support from the scheme.

However, after underspending in the first year they have increased their promotion of the scheme to targeting organisations and improved the information on the council's [website](#). They expect to have spent the budget by the end of 2014/15.