

Cabinet Member for Adults and Health	Ref No: AHxx (18/19)
December 2018	Key Decision: Yes
Local Assistance Network budget	Part I
Report by Executive Director Children, Families, Health and Education and Interim Director of Adults' Services	Electoral Division(s): All
<p>Summary</p> <p>As part of the Council's budget proposals consideration has been given to aims and responsibilities underpinning the Council's expenditure. In September 2018 the Cabinet Member decided to consult on the implications of proposals for a reduction in the Local Area Assistance (LAN) budget from £807,000 to £200,000 per annum. The LAN is a discretionary grant provided to support individuals in times of short term crisis and hardship. It is delivered through a partnership with voluntary sector agencies which provide assistance, very largely on an 'in kind' basis</p> <p>The scheme was launched in 2013 when funding for discretionary welfare provision was transferred from the benefits system to local government and 'ring fenced' for this purpose. The 'ring fence' was removed in 2015 and since then funding must be drawn from the Council's base budget.</p> <p>In October WSCC began a stakeholder engagement exercise in order to gather views regarding changes to the service in the light of a proposed reduction to the LAN budget from April 2019. This process has informed the proposals that are now being put forward to restructure the investment within a revised financial envelope. These proposals prioritise investment that support Council Statutory duties and provide relief to individuals in the most immediate crisis. The remaining investment is used to offer some strategically targeted support that will enable the providers to make best use of other options to access alternative resources.</p> <p>In summary the revised allocation will continue the existing level of allocation to the food banks and Children and Family Centres and make a reduced contribution to the Citizens Advice offer and social enterprise providers.</p>	
<p>West Sussex Plan: Policy Impact and Context</p> <p>The LAN contributes to the West Sussex Plan objective for Stronger Communities. This proposal is one of several strategic proposals being put forward as part of the County Council's 2019/20 budget process.</p>	
<p>Financial Impact</p> <p>This proposal delivers a financial saving of £607,000.</p>	

Recommendation

The Cabinet Member for Adults and Health is recommended to approve a reduction in the budget for the LAN from £807,000 to £200,000 per annum from 2019/20 onwards and a remodelling of the remaining service that:

- Maintains support to Children and Family Centres supporting the Council's statutory duties to provide an early help offer. Ensuring that the remaining offer is targeted.
- Maintains support to foodbanks targeting individuals and families with the highest level of need.
- Reduces the contribution to Citizens advice, recognising that the Council provides other funding to this service, but accepting the importance of maintaining a specific targeted LAN offer focused on locally based face to face services to the CA's which already has extensive locations across the County.
- Reduces the contribution to social enterprises.

PROPOSAL

1. Background and Context

- 1.1 The Local Assistance Network (LAN) was established in 2013 when the Department of Work and Pensions abolished a number of discretionary elements of the benefits system, and transferred the responsibility for providing discretionary assistance to Local Government. A 'ring fenced' grant was provided to the County Council for two years. Since 2015 funding for the LAN has been funded from the Council's base budget.
- 1.2 The principle behind the LAN is to provide discretionary services to households facing hardship as a result of a crisis or emergency. Typically this involves provision of food, utility top ups, furniture, white goods or household equipment. No financial assistance is available although, in some circumstances, providers offer low value supermarket store cards to purchase essential items. There are no eligibility criteria.
- 1.3 LAN grant funding currently offers support to four types of services: Foodbanks, Children and Family Centres, Citizens Advice and Social Enterprise Providers. A full breakdown of the LAN schemes can be seen at appendix one.

2. Proposal Details

- 2.1 Recognising the Council's significant financial challenge and the predominantly discretionary nature of the LAN there was a proposal to reduce expenditure from £807,000 to £200,000 per annum from April 2019. In September 2018 the Cabinet Member agreed to consult on the implications of these proposals.

- 2.2 Consultation has focused on a fundamental re-appraisal of the way the scheme works. During the course of the discussions that have taken place with providers and stakeholders a number of consistent themes emerged;
- The importance of developing 'networks' in which agencies are encouraged to collaborate and assist service users to navigate their way between different services
 - The importance of providing opportunities for people in crisis to access 'face to face' support within an accessible local setting
 - The value of preventing destitution amongst vulnerable households which would arise from lack of access to basic items such as food and fuel (utilities).

The advantage of the LAN approach, which builds on the capacity of existing providers and avoids unduly complicated eligibility criteria or application protocols, is regarded as effective in delivering assistance to households most at risk. Proposals for the future aim to retain these strengths.

- 2.3 In consideration of a reduced LAN, investment must be prioritised according to need and potential vulnerability and crisis situations. On this basis there is a proposal to maintain funding levels to support Food Banks and the Children and Families centres.
- 2.4 The remaining grant will be used to support a reduced targeted local offer within Citizens Advice, which will focus on signposting and a contribution to social enterprise providers' infrastructure.

Food Banks

- 2.5 The eight Trussell Trust Food banks¹ provide good local access points from which applicants can seek help. Food banks provide assistance to households for a limited period based on a voucher referral system. Seven of the eight Trussell Trust Food banks currently receive funding through LAN. This funding is used to support the basic infrastructure of these services, e.g. premises and storage facilities, enabling the services to access to additional sources of revenue and resources to support the overall food bank offer.
- 2.6 In a reduced LAN, the food banks will help to retain an accessible base from which assistance can be provided in most of the larger towns in West Sussex with the potential to also meet needs of individuals living in outlying communities through volunteers. There is also some potential for widening the range of services which can be accessed through Food Banks, for example to debt advice and money management. It is therefore proposed to maintain LAN funding for food banks at the current level.

Children and Family Centres (CFCs)

- 2.7 The County Council has statutory responsibilities to children and families. CFCs provide a good local base where help can be provided through face to face interactions. The CFCs' LAN role within both Crawley and Littlehampton

¹ Chichester, Bognor Regis, Littlehampton, Worthing, Shoreham, Haywards Heath, Horsham and East Grinstead.

is especially important. By continuing to support the provision of practical assistance through CFCs the Council will be maintaining a crisis offer for families with children. This provides essential support such as furniture, white goods, baby equipment, clothing, sometimes food, etc. It is therefore proposed to maintain LAN funding to CFCs at the current level. Given the significant savings that are being made elsewhere in the LAN budget, it is recognised that pressure on CFCs is likely to increase. This will need to be addressed as part of the implementation plan to ensure that the resources are focused on prioritising the highest level of need.

Citizens Advice (CA)

- 2.8 The Council already provides funding to support the general 'core' CA service in West Sussex with the LAN being an additional revenue stream. There is significant overlap in the support provided through the LAN, for example with benefits advice, debt and money management and the core CA offer. However, feedback from consultation has highlighted the significant benefit of providing locally accessible face to face support for some individuals who struggle with an on line offer and therefore there is a case for continuing with some additional investment which is specifically targeted at LAN priorities.
- 2.9 In response to this it is envisaged that CA would continue to receive a reduced amount of LAN funding which would support some focussed provision for LAN service users, rather than this be absorbed in a more general CA offer. This will involve supporting LAN clients to find alternative sources of help from either the statutory or charitable sector. Given the overall reduction in the budget it is envisaged that this would reduce by approximately 50% from the current allocation of £72,000 p.a.

Social Enterprise Providers

- 2.10 A substantial proportion of the current LAN funding is allocated to five charitable organisations who between them provide the core LAN in respect of utility top ups, furniture and white goods². Between them these providers received £555,000 in the current year amounting to 71% of allocated funds. These providers have developed services based on a social enterprise model, which in most cases complements their core charitable purpose. Much of this pre-dates the establishment of the LAN; for example involving recycling of donated furniture or provision of work experience for residents living in supported housing etc. LAN funding has enabled this provision to expand to meet a wider range of needs which in appropriate cases might involve the provision of more expensive items such as basic 'white goods'. Last year 799 households were provided with white goods by LAN providers.
- 2.11 There is no doubt that this role is extremely valuable especially in the case of households moving into new homes; perhaps following a domestic breakdown or other emergency. However as this service predates LAN investment and is underpinned by charitable furniture services it is suggested that alternative funding sources may be available to continue this in different ways at local level, albeit at a significantly reduced level. The reduction will mean these services are unable to provide the miscellaneous

² Stone Pillow, Turning Tides, Crawley Open House, Horsham Matters, Furnihelp

services. For children and families some needs can continue to be met within the CFC offer, but for single people and childless couples, the capacity to assist will be much more limited. Feedback from consultation has suggested that whilst these Social Enterprise providers are likely to continue to offer some services, a small amount of LAN grant to support some of the infrastructure costs, e.g. storage and transport, would significantly enhance this capacity

2.12 It is therefore proposed that some funding to the social enterprise providers is maintained albeit at a substantially reduced level. The purpose of the remaining funding would be to support the retention of some core capacity to and enable providers to attract support from other stakeholders. It is envisaged that this would not amount to more than £50,000 across the whole County. Clearly this would not be sufficient to support the continuation of a basic furniture service nor would it provide any white goods, however it should support these social enterprises to meet some infrastructure costs, e.g. storage and transport, which will allow the continuation of independent furniture collection and distribution schemes.

2.13 Work is required to develop an implementation plan. The significant milestones to ensure delivery can be seen in the table below:

Date	Activity	Lead Officer
December 2018	Cabinet Member Decision	Executive Director Children's, Adults, Families, Health and Education (Kim Curry)
By end of January 2019	Discussion with providers regarding the implications of the proposed changes	Director of Adults Services (Paul Mckay) and Director of Communities (Rachel North)
By end of March 2019	Updated SLA	Director of Adults Services (Paul Mckay) and Director of Communities (Rachel North) Paul Mckay
April 2019	2019/20 budget reductions implemented	Director of Adults Services (Paul Mckay) and Director of Communities (Rachel North)

FACTORS TAKEN INTO ACCOUNT

3. Consultation

3.1 The consultation process opened on 3rd October 2018 and closed on 3rd December 2018. Key stakeholders, service providers, local authorities, elected members and members of the public were encouraged to participate through a number of different mediums that included;

- An on line survey via the West Sussex County Council website. All survey documents were made available in easy read formats and printable form that could be submitted in person or by post
- A dedicated e-mail address for representations
- Meetings with Officers and the County Council Cabinet Members for Adults and Children’s Services respectively

Participation

15 service providers formed a Provider Coalition to develop a combined response to the budget proposals (for both LAN and Housing Related Support). The Coalition held five meetings which were attended by the County Council lead officers for the consultation process and one by the Cabinet Member for Adults & Health.

- 101 responses were received to the online survey questionnaire
- 5 e-mail responses were received by the dedicated e-mail address for the consultation
- 4 submissions were received from LAN provider partners (see 3.2 below). A briefing was given to all District & Borough Council Housing Needs Officers and to the Department of Work & Pensions Partnerships Manager
- Individual meetings took place with 11 service external providers, in addition to collective meetings with the wider Provider Coalition

3.2 An analysis of the consultation responses and the impact analysis can be seen in Appendices 2 and 3. Detailed responses from providers involved in the LAN are available as Background Papers.

4. Financial (revenue and capital) and Resource Implications

4.1 The current budget for services provided through the LAN contracts is £807K and supports services across the county. This is funded from the base Council budget. The scale of the financial challenge facing the Council across the entire range of services means that all financial commitments have to be tested and challenged.

4.2 In 2019/20 it is envisaged that the LAN budget of £200,000 would be distributed broadly in line with the figures shown below, based on the prioritisation of the Council’s statutory duties and targeting support at individuals and families most in need. Individual allocations to agencies would be agreed as part of the Implementation Plan referred to in 2.12.

	<i>2018/19 LAN allocations £000s</i>	<i>2019/20 Proposed LAN allocations £000s</i>
Food Banks	35	35
Citizens’ Advice	72	35
Children & Family Centres	80	80
Social Enterprise Providers	555	50
Store Cards	32	-
Other & unallocated	33	-
Total	807	200

Revenue consequences of proposal

	Current Year 2018/19 £m	Year 2 2019/20 £m	Year 3 2020/21 £m	Year 4 2021/22 £m
Current budget	£0.807	£0.807	£0.2	£0.2
Proposed change		-£0.607	-	-
Remaining budget		£0.2	-	-

5. Legal Implications

- 5.1 The County Council does not carry any statutory responsibilities for the relief of destitution save where this is a factor connected with the responsibilities for children in need (individually or within their family) or adults with social care needs. The County Council recognises the benefits of supporting measures which contribute to the prevention of more acute needs from those who are vulnerable or at risk of falling into circumstances requiring more significant support or intervention. The allocation of funds has therefore been focused on addressing this issue with funding maintained for those services that support statutory duties and prioritise individuals and families most in need.
- 5.2 Current levels of financial support have been provided through Service Level Agreements with various agencies and voluntary partners. Through the consultation on proposals and future implementation of the changes the Council will work closely with these other organisations to jointly manage their impact and mitigate adverse impact on those whose support will be reduced.

6. Risk Assessment Implications and Mitigations

- 6.1 The key risk arising from the reduction in the LAN involves the extent to which the absence of services which have hitherto been available results in displacing needs to other services which are subsequently harder or more costly to meet. There are three broad kinds of provision which account for the majority of the LAN spending: food, fuel (utilities) and household equipment/furniture. The table below shows how risks in each of these areas will be managed or mitigated.

<i>Provision</i>	<i>Risk Mitigation</i>
Food	Funding in this area is not proposed to reduce. The Food Bank network is strong and can be sustained
Utility Top Ups	Approximately £20,000 p.a. is spent on these. This funding will be wrapped up in the allocation to CFCs to ensure that existing capacity to support this service to families with children is maintained.
Household Equipment & Furniture	Provision for this will significantly reduce albeit some capacity will continue to exist through CFCs. Potentially there are opportunities to mitigate the loss of this provision through other solutions. Examples of this could include: Furniture Reuse via Social Enterprise or the provision of Furnished Tenancies via Social Landlords, whose tenants are generally the beneficiaries of LAN funded items

7. Other Options Considered

7.1 A brief summary of the four main options considered is shown in the table below.

Option	Reasons for Selection or Rejection
Maintain existing 'network' but prioritise the funding maintaining statutory functions and support to food banks.	This is the recommended option since it maintains an overall offer to households in crisis across all parts of the County and at the same time retaining a priority focus on the needs of families with children.
Focus funding through a smaller number or a single provider	Advantages of scale and efficiency would be outweighed by the loss of a local service in all parts of the County. Elsewhere discretionary welfare schemes based on remote application processes have proved unsuccessful.
Maintain funding at existing or higher level than proposed	This is not considered to be sustainable given the pressures on statutory services and the Council's financial resources and the discretionary nature of the services involved
Remove funding completely	WSCC's investment in LAN helps to prevent reliance on other services and helps to build community resilience by supporting social enterprise and independent voluntary initiatives which might otherwise be less effective or unsustainable. This should be sustained to the extent it remains viable to do so.

8. Equality and Human Rights Assessment

8.1 The County Council has a duty under Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 ('the Act') to have due regard in the exercise of its functions to the need to: eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation and the need to promote equality of opportunity for those that share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

8.2 The proposal will involve the remodelling of the Local Assistance Network and corresponding reduction in services available for households in crisis situations. Some help will continue to be available with food and utility top ups but access to furniture and white goods will significantly reduce. The impact of these changes in relation to those with protected characteristics is as follows

8.3 Summary Equality Impact Assessment

Careful assessment has been made of the individuals, groups and communities who use or benefit from the LAN funded services, informed by the consultation process and data collated. This has considered how those with particular protected characteristics may be affected by the proposals. Attention has been given to any elements of the services which can be considered to be of particular interest or benefit to such groups or individuals

by reference to their identity with such protected characteristics. In summary it is not considered that any of the LAN funded services aim to or can be seen as supporting those with any of these characteristics more than others with similar needs and it has also been concluded that the proposed changes to the focus of LAN support will not adversely or unduly affect any particular group so identified. The possible impact on reducing equality of opportunity for those with and those without protected characteristics has been included in that assessment.

9. Social Value and Sustainability Assessment

- 9.1 Almost all of the organisations which participate in the LAN are third sector, not for profit organisations. These organisations provide additional social value to West Sussex by attracting additional inward investment in the form of public grants and charitable fundraising as well as social capital in the form of volunteering and campaigning activity. Part of the aims of the remodelling and implementation of the LAN funding will be to maintain these benefits as far as can be achieved, working with these organisations at a local level and collectively.

10. Crime and Disorder Reduction Assessment

- 10.1 Within the overall impact assessment consideration is given to whether there is any quantifiable risk that the reduced availability of crisis led funds and support will lead to an increased risk of crime and disorder. Whilst there is no direct correlation it is an aspect of the plans for implementation which will require some further attention.

Kim Curry

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Appendices

Appendix one: *Analysis of LAN spend 2017/18 & Allocations 2018/19*

Appendix two: Consultation feedback and impact assessment

Background papers:

'Finding Help in a Crisis' WSCC LAN leaflet

https://www.westsussex.gov.uk/media/5101/local_assistance_network.pdf

Analysis of the use of Food Banks in West Sussex: WSCC Insights

<https://public.tableau.com/profile/matt.gover#!/vizhome/Foodbankv2/Foodbank-Chichester?publish=yes>

Horsham Matters: Response to Consultation on LAN

West Sussex Coalition of Providers: Impacts of Proposed WSCC Cuts to the Housing Related Support and Local Assistance Budgets

[Local Assistance Network consultation response from Citizens Advice in West Sussex](#)

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Appendix 1

Local Assistance Network; Summary of Use 2017/18 & Allocated Funding 2018/19					
<i>Household Composition of Applicants*</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>LAN Providers</i>	<i>Service users 2017/18</i>	<i>Funding allocated 2018/19</i>	
Single	2,661	Citizens Advice	712	72,000	Countywide
Couple	615	Children & Family Centres	1512	80,000	Countywide but significant spend in Crawley
Single Parent Family	1,161	Crawley Open House	550	80,000	Crawley
Two Parent Family	708	Furnihelp	383	60,000	Mid Sussex
Total Applicants	5,145	Horsham Matters	604	100,000	Horsham (also provides Trussell Trust Foodbank)
		Stone Pillow	715	130,000	Chichester and Bognor
<i>Total - forms of assistance provided</i>		Turning Tides	550	185,000	Worthing, Adur & Littlehampton
Clothing	76	Misc Others	119		Find it Out, Probation.
Food	2,415		5,145	707,000	
Furniture	910	Supermarket store cards		32,000	Provided through CA & other non funded agencies
Travel	437	<i>Trussell Trust Foodbanks</i>	<i>Users</i>		
Utility Top Up	1,199	Bognor	1091	7,500	
White Goods	799	Chichester	779	6,000	
Total	5,836	East Grinstead	753	7,000	
		Haywards Heath	337	6,000	
None- declined	87	Littlehampton	554	4,000	
Signposted elsewhere	694	Shoreham	452		
		Worthing	945	4,000	
<i>* Figures exclude Foodbanks listed separately</i>			4,911	34,500	

Appendix 2: Local Assistance Network Budget: Impact Assessment & Mitigations

<i>Assistance Type</i>	<i>Numbers Affected 2017/18</i>	<i>Impact of Changes Proposed</i>	<i>Mitigations</i>
Provision of Food	7,300 cases	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maintenance of existing funding to Food Banks, so no change Reduction or withdrawal of pre-paid supermarket cards: this will reduce the capacity for immediate help as service users are likely to have to wait for Food bank opening days 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local networking to ensure that Food Banks have capacity to meet need including flexibility to respond to those living in more rural & isolated communities
Furniture and Household Goods	910 cases	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Significant reduction of grant to 'Social Enterprise' providers will greatly reduce capacity to provide free goods Some providers may discontinue this activity Likely to impact mainly on low income households moving into unfurnished social housing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is likely that some charitable capacity will remain in the market 'second hand furniture market. Not least because there are already some providers offering this service without LAN funding. Potential exists for providers to continue attracting some funding & assistance via local arrangements with social landlords or other stakeholders
Provision of White Goods	799 cases	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is unlikely that provision of new white goods will form part of the LAN offer in future, perhaps with the exception of a few exceptional cases Groups affected by this will primarily be those moving into unfurnished social housing or moving home as a result of an emergency 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A limited number of other sources of grants for these kind of goods are available Budgeting loans may also be an option for some applicants The potential exists for Social Landlords to grant furnished tenancies including which could include provision of white goods
Emergency Travel Needs	437 cases	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Capacity to assist will reduce 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provision in this area varies considerably, to some extent reflecting DWP and LA housing practices Potentially some of these demands should be met elsewhere; however more work will be required in this area.
Utility Top Ups	1,199 cases	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is envisaged that this will continue to be available through Children & Family Centres Capacity to assist single applicants without children will be limited 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Potential to approve some 'top ups through the CA network

Clothing	76 cases	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This is a relatively small area in terms of numbers of applicants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Capacity exists to provide second hand clothing to meet many needs. Bespoke needs may be met through Children & Family Centres
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1. Equality Duty

1.1 The aim of the duty is to enable improvements in outcomes for people with protected characteristics. The protected characteristics are:-

age	religion or belief
disability	gender reassignment
race	sexual orientation
sex	pregnancy and maternity
	marriage and civil partnership

1.2 The Duty requires us, when taking any decision, to undertake an assessment of whether there is an opportunity to help achieve three positive outcomes. This is done by ensuring the decision maker has due regard to the need to

- eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation;
- advance equality of opportunity; and
- foster good relations between persons who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

Due regard means giving conscious thought to these aims when taking any decision and when gathering information in preparation for the decision.

1.3 In accordance with the Council's approach to the Equality Duty it will consider positive steps to remove disadvantage and encourage people who are disadvantaged to participate in public life or in anything where their participation is low; acting to promote understanding between people with protected characteristics and others. The weight given to these

considerations as part of any decision will depend upon how much the decision could affect equality of opportunity and fairness. It is a need to:

- be aware and show awareness of the Duty
- apply your mind to it before and whilst considering a proposal
- exercise the Duty with rigour and with an open mind
- have sufficient information on which to base the assessment
- maintain a review of the impact and effects of the decision
- be able to show how all of the above was done

1.4 The work being proposed to review arrangements against the outcomes aimed for and the responsibilities to be met will include information to explain what effects the decision will or could have such as data on the characteristics of residents and customers potentially affected by the proposals. The feedback from the consultation will provide additional data and indications for this exercise and the process will identify where this data is relevant and reliable for this purpose.

1.5 Where the information and any impact assessment suggest adverse impacts upon one or more of the protected groups the assessment will address -

- what is the extent and nature of the impact
- what actions can be taken to mitigate the impact and how
- whether such actions are proportionate to the aims
- how much time may be needed and whether to alter the proposal
- whether are other options available that would have less impact
- whether is it proportionate to implement the decision proposals

1.6 In summary, in implementing the proposals and through the joint work planned every effort will be made to ensure we have and understand information on the impact of particular proposals on groups with protected characteristics.

- Will such people be affected more than the general population?
- Will the effect be to reduce their opportunities or quality of life?
- In either case what is the nature and extent of the impact?
- Can more be done to eliminate or reduce the impact?
- If so is it still right to go ahead with the proposal?

Application to Proposals

- 1.7 It is proposed that the Council allocates funding for LAN to ensure delivery of the defined targeted aims and prevention to avoid increased demand pressure in other areas.
- 1.8 The data captured from work with partners and the feedback from the consultation will be examined and analysed within the approach set out above and a record retained of how the aims have been considered in the implementation plan. This will be managed with reference to the equality impact approach described above. The partner agencies will hold data in relation to current and past service users and the overall profile of service users in terms of the focus or intended groups or range of needs their service is intended to meet. Equally the evaluation of current funding and how it will be applied or withdrawn and how that process will be achieved will take account of whether any disproportionate impact is likely in terms of those with protected characteristics and the other equality responsibilities described above.

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Appendix 3. Analysis of Local Assistance Network Consultation

The overwhelming majority (88%) of responses were critical of the proposal. Respondents who opposed the budget reduction frequently expressed views that:

- Savings are a false economy, as cuts will result in higher costs at a later date for West Sussex County Council and other statutory service providers such as the NHS and D&B Councils.
- Cuts will increase levels of risk for vulnerable individuals especially at a time of change within the benefits system and the introduction of Universal Credit
- Budget savings should not be made at the expense of the poorest members of the community
- The value of the existing service to those who have depended on it. There were only three responses from people who had used the LAN, but many more from individuals who had had some first-hand experience of the LAN either as volunteers or referrers.

A summary of responses from the on-line survey is shown in the table below.

	Critical	Supportive	Neither	Total
Residents	68	5	5	78
Service users	3	0	0	3
Staff	14	0	0	14
Organisations	8	1	2	11
Total	93	6	7	106

The following comments are typical of those received:

"I have been referring people to the LAN for a number of years through roles in the local community. I recall helping a young single mother who had an autistic son to get a reconditioned washing machine. She had significant debts and was not able to replace her machine herself. She had a number of Provident loans as well as items she was paying for through Brighthouse. Without the help of LAN I feel sure she would have increased her debt further to secure a replacement". **Food Bank Volunteer**

"I understand that with a drastically reduced Revenue Support Grant, unless it takes the politically difficult decision to increase Council Tax, the Council needs to make budget cuts. However cutting the budget for this discretionary assistance which is only available when there is hardship as a result of a crisis or emergency will hit the most vulnerable residents when they are most in need. In the context of a benefit freeze since 2015 and the challenges many claimants face/will face making the transition to Universal Credit, it seems inconceivable that there will be any reduction in the number of households that need this assistance. There can be no grounds to believe that household crisis events will reduce so, unless there is absolute certainty that some alternative assistance from the private/charitable sector will fill the gap, if a 75% cut is made to the budget it can only be in the knowledge that it will leave many households facing extreme hardship and misery". **Church Group Leader**

"Most people we are supporting cannot work because they have long term and enduring mental health needs which impact on their ability to sustain employment and they rely on state benefits to live. Changes to benefits - Around the introduction of PIP universal credit have left many of our services users going through periods without an income at all. Our service users often don't have savings which they can use (having been out of work for a long time) or better off relatives to turn to for help and the LAN funded services are essential to provide a safety net of basic help in these circumstances for these people.

Without the current level of LAN support we consider that our service users and their families (who are already among the most vulnerable and impoverished in our society) will experience even greater poverty. The stress associated with this will impact on the mental health of individuals which in turn will lead to even greater pressure on local mental health services".

Chief Executive of Mental Health Charity

A number of respondents were critical of the consultation process and said they did not have enough information to form a view one way or the other.

A small number of respondents (6%) were supportive of the proposal. Comments in support of the proposal tended to express support for the scheme in principle but agreed that it should be reduced in line with the County Council's overall budget.