

Trafford Assist

Using local expertise to provide targeted preventative support for vulnerable residents

Summary of the scheme

- Scheme covers food parcels, fuel vouchers and furniture/white goods and other discretionary help as appropriate.
- Applications are made through Trafford CAB's dedicated helpline and can also be made online.
- Available to anyone aged over 16, living in Trafford, or intending to within the next six weeks.
- Food parcels are provided via the CAB, cover three days' worth of food and can be collected the same day.
- Fuel vouchers can be used to top up fuel keys at Paypoint outlets – available to collect at libraries and CAB.
- Furniture and white goods are provided by Rainbow Recycling Centre.

Key facts and figures

- In 2013/14:
 - 3036 applications were made and 81 per cent were successful
 - 1767 households were helped with food parcels
 - 1368 households were with helped with fuel vouchers
 - 576 households were given furniture.

Why Trafford's approach stood out

In designing Trafford Assist, the council worked hard to involve local partners to make best use of both the new funding and local expertise and resources. They saw the funding as an opportunity to provide better access to wider services to people who may previously only have sought help in crisis and not accessed services that would address their longer term challenges. The scheme was clearly defined, focusing on providing essentials such as food, fuel, furniture and white goods, but was sufficiently flexible to be able to consider other applications on a discretionary basis.

Project strengths

Early planning involving local partners already working with vulnerable people

From summer 2012, the Council's Transformation Team started to plan how to best make use of their local social welfare funding. They held five well attended

Making welfare work locally

consultation events with colleagues from across the council, the community and voluntary sector and Jobcentre Plus. They discussed lessons to learn from the aspects of the social fund that the scheme would be replacing. This included reviewing what worked well, as well as gaps in provision and barriers to accessing support. They reviewed what worked well and appropriate eligibility criteria, access and effective referral routes. The council recognised that they did not have expertise in delivering this type of service and developed a partnership board who together designed the scheme. This was made up of adult social care, Revenues and Benefits, children's services, transformation, Trafford Housing Trust, Rainbow furniture recycling social enterprise, Jobcentre Plus, CAB, Age UK, Your Housing Group, probation and Trafford Carers Centre. Once the scheme was implemented, the group was cut back to include only those involved in delivery. It continues to meet to keep the scheme under constant review.

'The partnership group communicates very well and we know that if there is ever an issue, we can just pick up the phone to each other. We are all working for the same people; we all have the same goal. We are working with a very vulnerable group of people and had to come up with a scheme in a very short space of time. It was important to get it right. The scheme was brand new, and it's not often that you get an opportunity like that. We have seen it as an opportunity.'

Rachel Valentine, Discretionary Payment Team Leader, Trafford Council

Joining up services to make efficient use of resources

The CAB makes claims for residents and assesses their wider advice needs at the same time.

'The Trafford Assist scheme has helped us to get in contact with people who we have not had contact with in the past, but who can really benefit from our support. This means we're able to target our help at those who are going through difficult times to help prevent further problems in the future. The scheme has also strengthened our relationships with local partners and we are working more closely together than ever before.'

Dale Maskell, Chief Officer, Citizens Advice Trafford

The council department that processes the claims also deals with discretionary housing payments and can make an award from whichever fund is most appropriate. A welfare rights officer works within the Trafford Assist team who are able to deal with all sanctions cases.

'We wanted to reach people who have never sought help before. We wanted to get to the root causes of their problems, and offer a wrap-around service to help with the underlining need.'

Rachel Valentine, Discretionary Payment Team leader, Trafford Council

Making welfare work locally

Flexibility and trust balanced with accountability checks

The scheme will provide up to two food and fuel awards per household a year and one furniture item. Requests for furniture are only granted after an income and expenditure assessment and a home visit, but an award of food and fuel which is of lower value, is given without assessing their financial position. The approach is to err on the side of trusting people, taking the opportunity of the contact to assess any underlying support needs.

Regular review and planning

They have introduced toiletries with the food parcels and discretion to provide travel vouchers. They are beginning to assess the financial benefits of the scheme to assess who it contributes to preventing greater spending later on. They have already secured agreement for the projected underspend to be carried over 2015/16 and the project steering group has presented a report on the value of the scheme to members. The report uses case studies to stress the value of the scheme to residents in crisis.