

Proposed Adults and Heath Scrutiny Report: Response to the consultation on Stockport Local Assistance Scheme

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 The Stockport Local Assistance Scheme (SLAS) consultation began on 20th November 2017 and ended on 22nd December 2017. This received 145 responses. At the close of the consultation it received 145 responses. 71% (104) of these were online respondents, 22% (31) stakeholders, and 7% (10) from Kiosks in libraries. Stakeholders were asked a different set of questions to the Web and Kiosk respondents.
- 1.2 72% (22) of stakeholders responded that they “tend to agree” or “strongly agree” that a more aligned service to include all discretionary payments with one referral form and access point would be helpful. 11% (3) “tend to disagree” or “Strongly disagree”.
- 1.3 There were 110 public responses to the question “How far do you agree or disagree that it would be easier if we have one application and one front door to access all payments available through the council” 72% (79) “tend to agree” or “Strongly agree” with 14% (15) “tend to disagree” or “Strongly Disagree”.

2. Background

- 2.1 Stockport Council currently offers financial assistance to people who require support to cover household or family expenses that they would otherwise be unable to manage. These payments include the following:

Stockport Local Assistance Scheme: This service offers support to meet emergency needs, for example where someone has no food, clothing or gas and electric for the home. The service may also offer support to people who are moving into new accommodation with things like rent in advance, furniture and white goods.

Discretionary Housing Payments: Discretionary Housing Payments can be awarded if someone is struggling to cover a shortfall in their rent and there are exceptional circumstances that are causing difficulties. These payments are available to people who are in receipt of Housing Benefit or the housing element of Universal Credit.

Section 17 funding: This is funding provided by Children’s Services when a family is experiencing a crisis and needs access to emergency financial support to cover urgent expenses.

Secondary school uniform payments: The Secondary School Clothing Scheme is available for children in years 7 to year 11 at secondary school who receive free school meals. The scheme helps to cover the cost of compulsory items of school uniform.

Free school meals: Free school meals are available to children and young people who are in full time education, this includes nursery children who attend full days and sixth form students - as long as the parent, guardian or carer is in receipt of a means tested benefit.

- 2.2 The Council needs to make savings and we are looking at how we currently assess, administer and allocate payments through the different schemes mentioned above. The Council would like to make things easier for people who apply by having one application form and one front door to access these payments. To do this options are being considered to look at how we can bring these services together. This consultation is an opportunity to give your views on the current arrangements and to give feedback on what would improve things for people applying for financial assistance from the Council.

3. **Methodology**

Consultation on the Stockport Local Assistance Scheme began on 20th November 2017 and ended on 22nd December 2017. The questionnaire had been placed on the Councils Have Your Say Webpage alongside supporting information explaining the proposals. In addition to this, the questionnaire was available on electronic touchscreen kiosks placed in Libraries where there were also paper copies. **A direct email was sent containing a link to the consultation for Stakeholders. Over 50 Stakeholders were invited to complete the questionnaire including Internal Council colleagues and departments, external partner agencies, and various third sector organisations.**

- 3.1 A number of communications supported this consultation including posters placed in public buildings, news releases, and messages broadcast via Facebook and Twitter.
- 3.2 At the close of the consultation it received 145 responses. 104 of these were online respondents, 31 stakeholders and 10 from Kiosks in libraries.

4. **Stakeholders**

- 4.1 100% (31) of Stakeholders were aware of SLAS and had referred people to the scheme. The main themes received for feedback on SLAS were that the scheme has efficient processes and good levels of customer service. A small proportion of respondents 7% (2) commented that the application form was too long and that more could be done to increase awareness of the scheme 7% (2).
- 4.2 71% (22) of Stakeholders had supported people to apply for other discretionary payments. 55% (12) were for Discretionary Housing Payments, 24% (5) Free School Meals, 18% (4) School Uniform, and 3% (1) Section 17 funding. This shows a good awareness of the different discretionary payments available amongst stakeholders. The low number for Section 17 payments can be explained by this funding being accessed by allocated Social Workers within Stockport Family.
- 4.3 72% (22) of stakeholders responded that they “tend to agree” or “strongly agree” that a more aligned service to include all discretionary payments with one referral form and access point would be helpful. 11% (3) “tend to disagree” or “Strongly disagree”.
- 4.4 Stakeholders fed back on how the Council currently administers financial assistance to people in need with the main themes of the responses centred around the current financial assistance available being unclear as to what is on offer from the various schemes. There appeared to be concern that one online form and access point may reduce the availability of staff to assist people to apply either over the phone or face to face, and that any assistance awarded should be based on verified need and assess household income, and that non council funded options should be offered where appropriate.

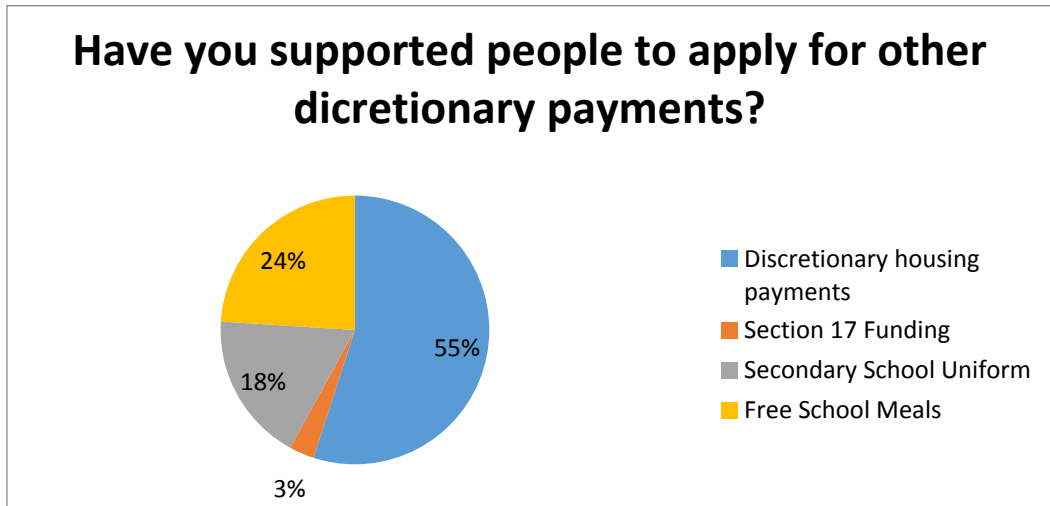
5. **Web and Kiosk**

- 5.1 The Web and Kiosk consultations contained the same questions and formatting as each other and have been combined for the purpose of this report. There were 114 responses in total. 91% (103) of respondents were aware of SLAS with 56% (54) having applied to the scheme in the past. 95% (51) of those who had applied stated that the service addressed their needs at the time.
- 5.2 88% (100) of the respondents had not accessed any financial support from the Council other than SLAS. 12% (14) people had accessed other financial assistance, 37% (5) were Discretionary Housing Payments and 42% (6) free school meals. Respondents commented that they found these payments very useful often at a difficult time, although some found the application processes could be confusing and lengthy.
- 5.3 79% (90) of respondents are aware of the credit union and 39% (37) had used this service. 77% (89) of people responded to the question "How far do you agree or disagree that Stockport Credit Union was useful to you in helping you to deal with planned or unplanned expenses?" out of 114 respondents 32% (37) of them had used the service and this could explain the high percentage of people who "didn't Know" 35% or "Neither disagree or agree" 28%. 37% of respondents "Strongly agree" or "Tend to Agree". Nobody answered that they "Strongly Disagree" or "Tend to Disagree."
- 5.4 There were 110 responses to the question "How far do you agree or disagree that it would be easier if we have one application and one front door to access all payments available through the council" 72% (79) "tend to agree" or "Strongly agree" with 14% (15) "tend to disagree" or "Strongly Disagree".
- 5.5 20 respondents had feedback on how the council currently administers financial assistance to people who are in need. The main themes were concern that one form and front door could mean that the process and application become more complex and more difficult to access, concern that the process and decision time would take longer through one front door, and that the various current access points were confusing to some people. There were several respondents who felt that the council should look to make savings elsewhere and not reduce funding to the most vulnerable people in Stockport. The positive themes were how thankful people were for the help they received at a time of need, and that the service they received was very good.

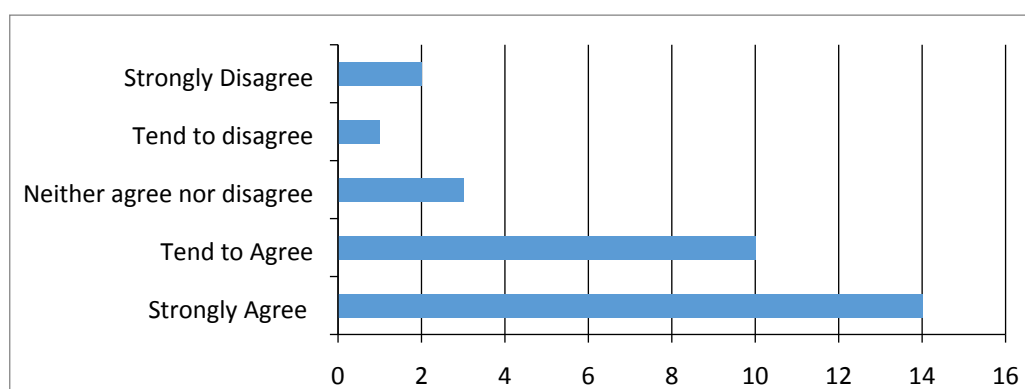
6. **Results: Stakeholder Response**

- 6.1 31 responses were gained from Stakeholders with 100% of respondents aware of the Stockport Local Assistance Scheme (SLAS) and 100% (31) having referred people to the service.
- 6.2 24 Respondents (77%) (24) had feedback to offer on the service based upon their experience of referring to the scheme.
- 6.3 Overall within the 24 responses were 16 positive comments concerning the efficiency of the SLAS schemes processes and 11 positive comments about the customer service provided by the SLAS team.
- 6.4 There were five negative comments within the responses, two concerned the length of the online form, two were about awareness of the scheme and what it offers, and one was about keeping up to date records of phone calls received on the SLAS system.

- 6.5 Stakeholders were asked if they had ever supported people to apply for other discretionary payments. 29% respondents (9) had not supported people to apply for other discretionary payments and 71% (22) had.
- 6.6 The pie chart below shows which of the differing discretionary payments people were supported to apply for:



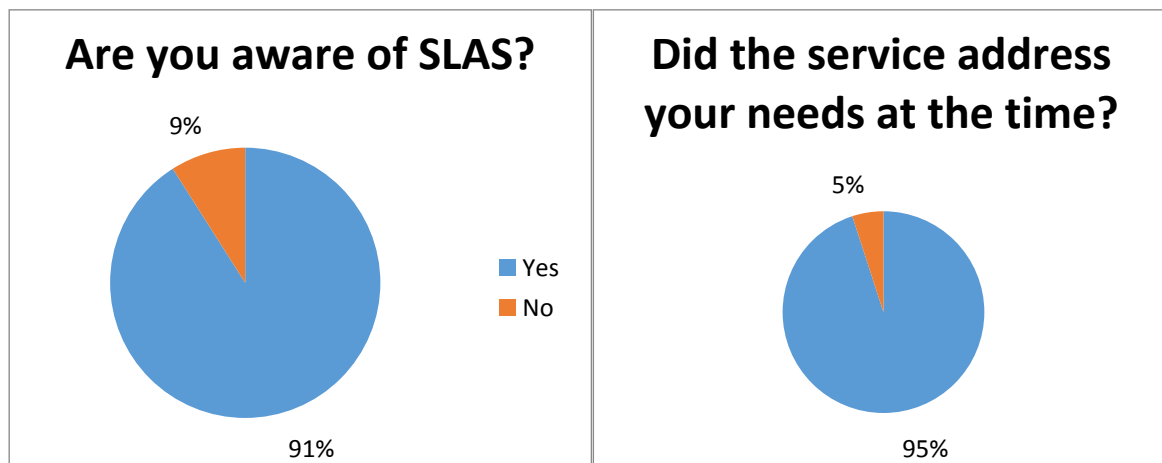
- 6.7 33% of respondents (11) had feedback based upon their experience of supporting people to access other discretionary payments. Discretionary housing payments were directly mentioned 4 times and Section 17 funding 1 time. 6 of the 11 Responses were not possible to attribute to a particular discretionary payment.
- 6.8 5 negative comments were received about the length and complexity of online application forms. 4 positive comments were made about the service received.
- 6.9 100% of respondents were aware of the credit union with 43% having referred people to this service. 10 respondents answered the question "In your experience has this service helped the people you are working with to deal with an unplanned expense" 80% (8) said yes and 20% (2) no.
- 6.10 9 Respondents gave feedback on Stockport Credit Union based on their experience of referring people to this service. 5 of the responses were positive and commented on: the Credit Union providing access to affordable credit (1) Being a great way to save (3) Helpful and informative staff (1). 2 of the comments received were negative and both concerned the rules around lending.
- 6.11 Respondents were asked "How far they agree or disagree that a more aligned service to include all discretionary payments, with one referral form and access point would be helpful" 30 people responded as follows:



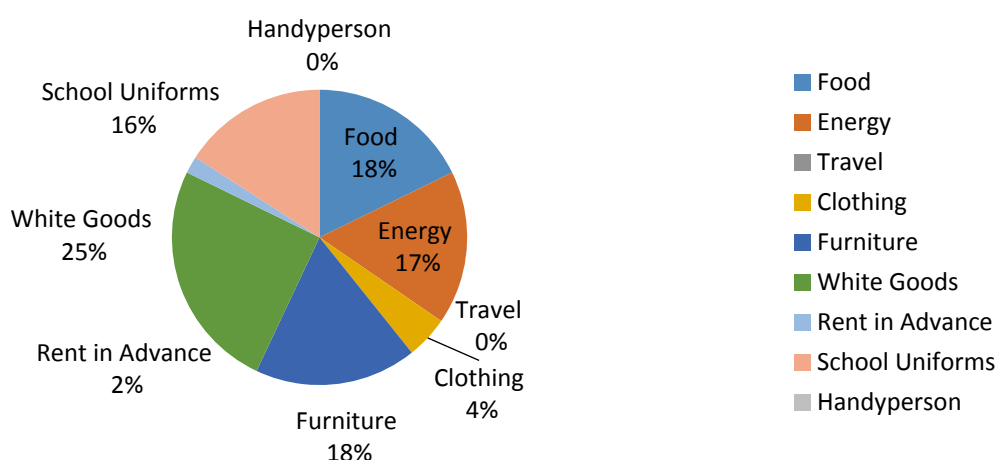
- 6.12 72% (14) of respondents strongly agree or tend to agree (10). 10% of respondents tend to disagree (1) or Strongly Disagree (2).
- 6.13 The final question put to respondents of the Stakeholder questionnaire was: Do you have any feedback on how the council currently administers financial assistance to people who are in need?
- 6.14 11 people responded. The main themes of the responses centred around the current financial assistance being unclear as to what is on offer across the different schemes, concern that one online form may reduce the availability of staff to assist people through the application either on the phone or face to face, and that assistance awarded should be verified and based on household income with non-council funded options offered where appropriate.

7. **Web and Kiosk Response**

- 7.1 As the Web and Kiosk responses contain exactly the same questions and formatting their results have been combined for the purpose of this report. There were 114 responses in total.

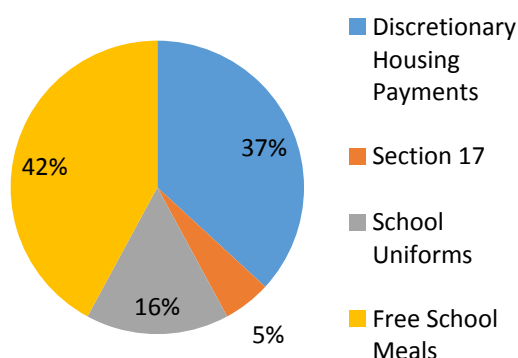


If you have applied, Which of the following did you apply for?

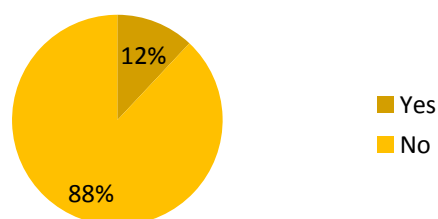


- 7.2 The above pie charts show that of those people who responded 91% were aware of SLAS and 56% had actually applied for assistance through the scheme. The types of items that are applied for can be split into daily living needs, such as food, energy, and clothing, or Household Costs such as Rent in advance, White goods and furniture. When viewed in this way the daily living needs account for 55% of items applied for and household costs 45%. 95% of people's needs were addressed by the scheme.

Which assistance did you access?

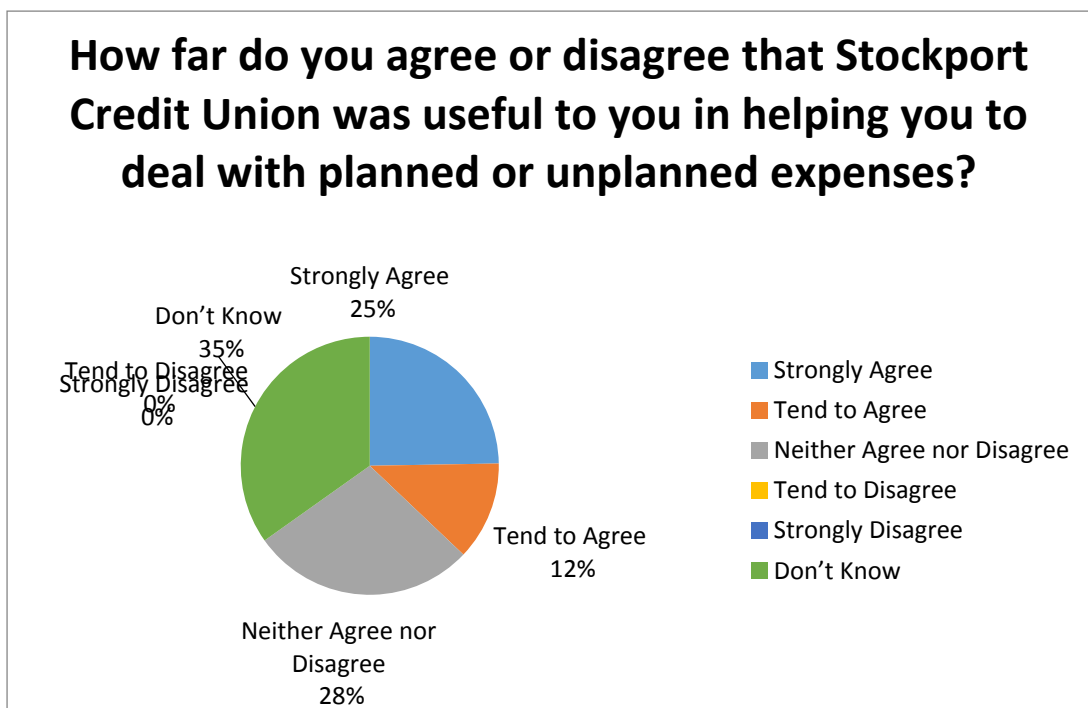
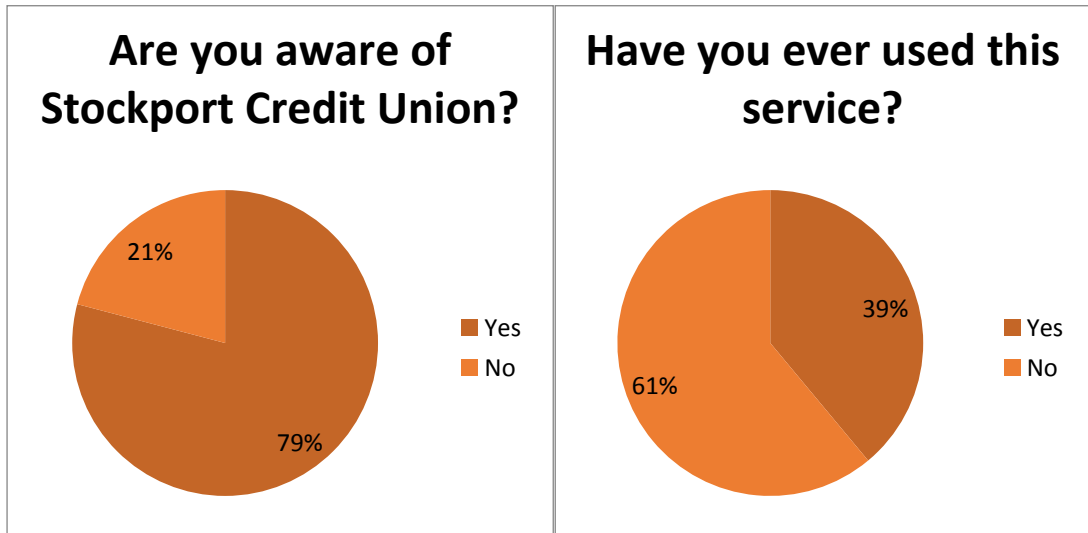


Have you ever accessed any other financial assistance from the Council?



- 7.3 The above two pie charts show that 88% of respondents had not accessed any financial support other than SLAS from the Council. Of the 12% people who had accessed other financial assistance the least accessed is Section 17 funding which would be expected as it is accessed through a Social Worker allocated to a family. School Uniforms are administered by the SLAS team but the public would not be aware of this. 37% accessed discretionary housing payments and 42% Free School Meals.
- 7.4 Respondents were asked to tell us about their experience of accessing these payments. Out of 114 people 7 answered this question, 5 were positive overall and two negative. The main themes

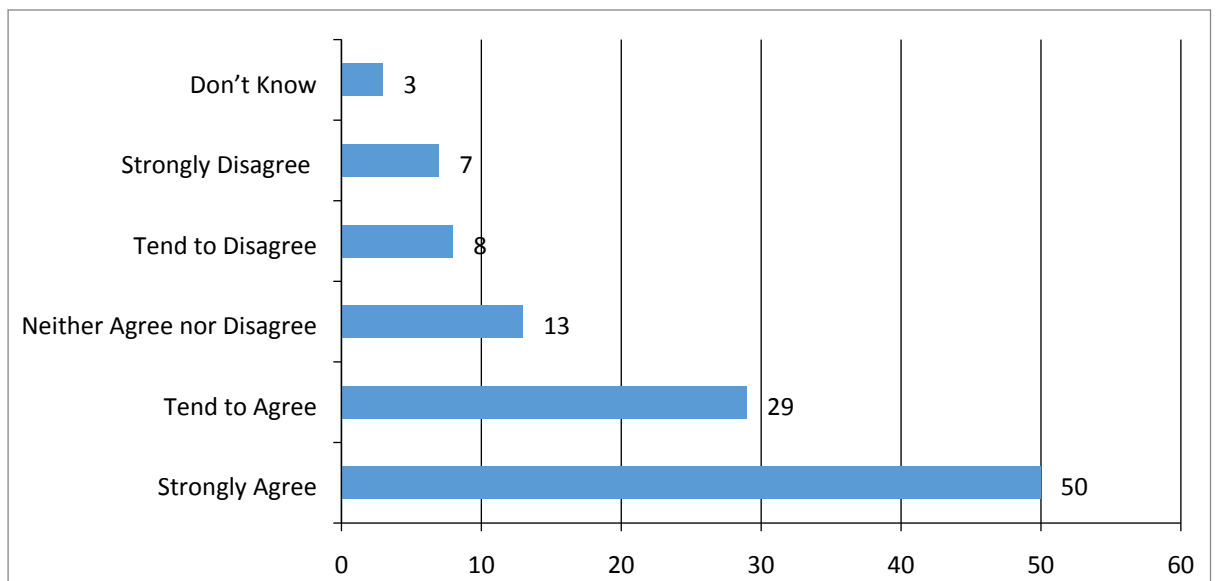
were that people found the payments very useful often at a difficult time for them; however the application process could be confusing and lengthy.



7.5 The above pie charts show the responses concerning the credit union. 79% (92) people responded that they are aware of the credit union and 39% had used the service. In response to the question “How far do you agree or disagree that the credit union was useful to you in helping you deal with planned or unplanned expenses?” 89 people responded to the question however only 37 had used the service which may explain the high number of people who responded “don’t Know” at 35% or neither disagree or tend to disagree at 28%. No respondents answered “tend to disagree” or “disagree” while 37% responded “Strongly agree” or “tend to agree”

7.6 30 respondents gave feedback on Stockport Credit Union based on their experience of using the service. 17 positive comments were made and 4 negative. 3 of the comments mentioned that they felt the Interest rate was too high on loans.

7.7 Respondents were asked the following question “The Council has to make savings and as part of this we want to look at how we offer financial assistance to people who need it. How far do you agree or disagree that it would be easier if we have one application form and one front door to access all payments available through the council” The below bar chart shown their answers:



7.8 72 % of the 110 responses “tend to agree” or “Strongly agree” that one application form and one front door to access all payments available through the council would be easier. 14% “Tend to disagree” or “Strongly Disagree”

7.9 20 respondents had feedback on how the council currently administers financial assistance to people who are in need. The main themes were concern that one form and front door could mean that the process and application become more complex and more difficult to access, concern that the process and decision time would take longer through one front door, and that the various current access points were confusing to some people. There were several respondents who felt that the council should look to make savings elsewhere and not reduce funding to the most vulnerable people in Stockport.

7.10 The positive themes were how thankful people were for the help they received at a time of need, and that the service they received was very good.