

Committee: **Corporate Overview & Performance Scrutiny**

Date of meeting: **23 September 2022**

Report Subject: **Discretionary Cost of Living Scheme**

Portfolio Holder: **Cllr. S. Thomas – Leader of the Council and Executive Member for Corporate Overview & Performance**

Report Submitted by: **R Hayden – Chief Officer Resources**

| Reporting Pathway | | | | | | | | |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------|-------------------------------|--------------------|---------------------|----------|----------------------|
| Directorate Management Team | Corporate Leadership Team | Portfolio Holder / Chair | Audit Committee | Democratic Services Committee | Scrutiny Committee | Executive Committee | Council | Other (please state) |
| | 15/09/22 | 16/09/22 | | | 23/09/22 | | 29/09/22 | |

1. **Purpose of the Report**
 - 1.1 To present the proposed Blaenau Gwent Discretionary Cost of Living Scheme (Appendix 1) for Members consideration.
2. **Scope and Background**
 - 2.1 During 2022, the Welsh Government has provided funding to all local authorities to provide a £150 one-off cost of living payment to all those eligible households in council tax bands A to D and those qualifying under the Council Tax Reduction Scheme (Main Scheme).
 - 2.2 Additional funding has also been provided to each Council's to enable them to provide support under a discretionary scheme, to help households considered to be in need of assistance with their living costs.
 - 2.3 Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council has received £746,000 to fund the Discretionary Scheme.
3. **Options for Recommendation**
 - 3.1 *To include Recommendation(s) / Endorsement by other groups, e.g. CMT/Committees/Other groups)*
 - 3.1.1 **Option 1 – to consider and recommend the Council adopt the proposed Discretionary Cost of Living Scheme**
 - 3.1.2 **Option 2 – to consider the proposed Discretionary Cost of Living Scheme and suggest amendments to Council prior to adoption of the scheme.**
 - 3.2 The proposed Discretionary Cost of Living Scheme will be considered by the Corporate Overview & Performance Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 23 September 2022.

4. **Evidence of how does this topic supports the achievement of the Corporate Plan / Statutory Responsibilities / Blaenau Gwent Well-being Plan**
- 4.1 The Cost of Living Support Scheme and Discretionary Cost of Living Scheme was announced as part of the Welsh Government's Supplementary Budget on 15 February 2022.
The schemes are intended to provide immediate support as Wales recovers from the pandemic and support households to deal with the impact of increasing energy and other costs.
- 4.2 The Discretionary Scheme fund can be used by each local authority to support it considers to be in need of assistance with their living costs. Each local authority will determine its use of discretionary support as it deems appropriate to address local needs.
5. **Implications Against Each Option**
- 5.1 ***Impact on Budget (short and long term impact)***
- 5.1.1 WG have provided funding of approximately £746,000 to enable Blaenau Gwent to deliver a local Discretionary Cost of Living Scheme.
In the unlikely event of an overspend against the scheme the additional costs will need to be funded by the general reserve.
- 5.1.2 ***Option 1 - agree the proposed Discretionary Cost of Living Scheme***
It is estimated that the proposed scheme will be delivered within the available resources. The actual cost will be dependent upon actual take up / applications received.
- 5.1.3 ***Option 2 – suggest amendments prior to agreeing the Discretionary Cost of Living Scheme***
The impact of any suggested changes to the scheme will be assessed to ensure the costs remain within the funding available i.e. re-profiling of funding.
- 5.2 ***Risk including Mitigating Actions***
- 5.2.1 There is a risk that eligible applicants will exceed the number estimated resulting in an overspend against budget.
This has been minimised by setting specific dates for eligibility (not open ended), assuming maximum take up of scheme at those dates and suggesting the proposing the payment levels.
- 5.2.2 There is a risk that a lower number of applicants than estimated register / apply for the payment resulting in an underspend against the available resources and eligible households not receiving the financial support they are entitled too.
This will be minimised by administering a direct payment for those household where we have current bank details and implementing a programme of communication to raise awareness of the scheme.
Any underspend can be carried forward and utilised in future years.
- 5.3 ***Legal***

- 5.3.1 The Discretionary Cost of Living Scheme will be administered in accordance with WG grant terms & conditions.
- 5.4 **Human Resources**
 - 5.4.1 Staff across Corporate Services will be involved in delivery of the scheme.
- 6. **Supporting Evidence**
 - 6.1 **Performance Information and Data**

See proposed scheme.
 - 6.2 **Expected outcome for the public**
 - 6.2.1 Agreement and adoption of a Discretionary Cost of Living Scheme will provide direct financial support to eligible households within Blaenau Gwent and indirect support for those households needing to utilise Food banks and / or seek advice from the Citizens Advice Bureau.
 - 6.3 **Involvement (consultation, engagement, participation)**
 - 6.3.1 CLT have considered the proposed policy. A communication programme will be implemented to raise awareness of the scheme and encourage eligible households to register / apply for the payment.
 - 6.4 **Thinking for the Long term (forward planning)**
 - 6.4.1 n/a – the proposed scheme will help eligible households with an ‘immediate’ financial contribution to help them with the Cost of Living pressures currently being faced.
 - 6.5 **Preventative focus**
 - 6.5.1 The financial contribution to eligible households, food banks and Citizens Advice Bureau will help support families facing significant hardship.
 - 6.6 **Collaboration / partnership working**
 - 6.6.1 Financial contributions will be made to the Blaenau Gwent Food Bank and Citizens Advice Bureau to increase resources available to support the families in Blaenau Gwent.
 - 6.7 **Integration (across service areas)**

n/a
 - 6.8 **Decarbonisation and Reducing Carbon Emissions**

n/a
 - 6.9 **Integrated Impact Assessment** *(the screening template should be completed for any decisions to identify if a full integrated impact assessment (IIA) is needed. A full IIA will need to be completed if the decision is part of the socio-economic duty to consider how the decision might help to reduce the inequalities of outcome associated with socio-economic disadvantage).*
 - 6.9.1 The integrated Impact Assessment undertaken in relation to this proposed policy is attached at Appendix 2.

7. **Monitoring Arrangements**

7.1 *State how the work will be monitored e.g. through scrutiny or directorate performance management arrangements*

Delivery of the Discretionary Cost of Living Scheme will be monitored by the Resources Service as part of the performance management arrangements in place.

Background Documents / Electronic Links

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