

Committee: **Council**

Date of Meeting: **30th March, 2023**

Report Subject: **Discretionary Cost of Living Scheme – Supplementary Proposals**

Portfolio Holder: **Councillor Stephen 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 | Governance Audit Committee | Democratic Services Committee | Scrutiny Committee | Cabinet | Council | Other (please state) |
| | 27/03/23 | | | | | | 30/03/23 | |

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 To present the proposed amendment to Blaenau Gwent Discretionary Cost of Living Scheme for Members consideration.

2. Scope and Background

- 2.1 During 2022, the Welsh Government 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 was also provided to each Council 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 received £746,000 to fund the Discretionary Scheme which was approved at Council on 29th September, 2022.
- 2.4 The supplementary proposals in the report maximises the benefits of the scheme for vulnerable households throughout Blaenau Gwent.

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 agree the proposed amendments to Blaenau Gwent Discretionary Cost of Living Scheme.

3.1.2 **Option 2** – to consider the proposed amendments to Blaenau Gwent Discretionary Cost of Living Scheme and suggest further amendments.

4. **Evidence of how 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 residents 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 It is estimated that the proposals in this report will cost approximately £200,000 and will be within the total funding envelope available (WG have provided funding of approximately £746,000 to enable Blaenau Gwent to deliver a local Discretionary Cost of Living Scheme). Any underspend against the scheme will be returned to Wales Government.

5.1.2 **Option 1 – agree the proposed amendments to Blaenau Gwent Discretionary Cost of Living Scheme**

It is estimated that the proposed amendments to the scheme will be delivered within the available resources and ensure full allocation it utilised prior to 31st March, 2023.

5.1.3 **Option 2 – suggest further amendments to Blaenau Gwent Discretionary Cost of Living Scheme**

The impact of alternative changes to the scheme will need to be assessed to ensure the costs remain within the funding available.

5.2 ***Risk including Mitigating Actions***

- 5.2.1 There is a risk that if the proposed amendments to the scheme are not agreed that the underspend will need to be returned to WG and not utilised to support residents across Blaenau Gwent with Cost of Living Crisis.

6.3 ***Legal***

- 6.3.1 The Discretionary Cost of Living Scheme will be administered in accordance with WG grant terms & conditions.

6.4 ***Human Resources***

- 6.4.1 Staff across Corporate Services will be involved in delivery of the scheme

7. **Supporting Evidence**

7.1 ***Performance Information and Data***

The following amendments are proposed to the Discretionary Cost of Living Scheme:

- 7.1.1 A contribution of £1,000 to organisations / groups currently providing Warm Spaces across the Borough. This will extend the current provision by a further 3 months.
- 7.1.3 An additional grant of £5,000 to be made to the Blaenau Gwent Foodbank & other Food Distribution Groups operating and supporting residents of Blaenau Gwent.
- 7.1.4 An additional contribution of £50,000 to be made to the Citizens Advice Bureau to enable the extension of the enhanced service that has been developed i.e. Dedicated resource working from Community Hubs, to December 2024 (SLA to be amended to support this) ensuring resource is available to support residents through the months ahead.

7.2 ***Expected outcome for the public***

- 7.2.1 Agreement and adoption of the amended Discretionary Cost of Living Scheme will provide support to eligible households within Blaenau Gwent needing to utilise Food banks and / or seek advice from the Citizens Advice Bureau.

7.3 ***Involvement (consultation, engagement, participation)***

- 7.3.1 Senior Officers have considered the proposed amendments to the scheme.

7.4 ***Thinking for the Long term (forward planning)***

- 7.4.1 The proposed amendments to the scheme will help eligible households to further support them with the Cost of Living pressures currently being faced.

7.5 **Preventative focus**

- 7.5.1 The financial contribution to eligible households, warm spaces, food organisations, food banks and Citizens Advice Bureau will help support families facing significant hardship.

7.6 **Collaboration / partnership working**

- 7.6.1 Further financial contributions to be made to the Blaenau Gwent Food Bank, Food distribution organisations and Citizens Advice Bureau to increase resources available to support the families in Blaenau Gwent.

7.7 **Integration (across service areas)**

n/a

7.8 **Decarbonisation and Reducing Carbon Emissions**

n/a

- 7.9 **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).*

- 7.9.1 An integrated impact assessment was undertaken in relation to the Creation of Discretionary Cost of Living Scheme.

8. **Monitoring Arrangements**

- 8.1 Delivery of the Discretionary Cost of Living Scheme will continue to be monitored by the Resources Service, supported by colleagues from Corporate Services as part of the performance management arrangements in place.
- 8.2 Robust monitoring is being developed with recipients of the Warm Space, Food Organisations, Blaenau Gwent Food Bank and Citizens Advice Bureau to evidence the impact the funding is having within Blaenau Gwent.