
Report To:	Policy & Resources Committee	Date:	19 November 2024
Report By:	Chief Financial Officer	Report No:	FIN/76/24/AP/TB
Contact Officer:	Alan Puckrin	Contact No:	01475 712090
Subject:	Anti-Poverty Fund – Fuel Poverty Payments Proposal		

1.0 PURPOSE AND SUMMARY

- 1.1 For Decision For Information/Noting
- 1.2 The purpose of this report is to obtain approval from Committee for a proposal to create a Fuel Poverty Fund with a specific proposal for the use of this fund for Winter 2024.
- 1.3 Fuel Poverty remains a key concern with elected members with £360,000 agreed by the September meeting to fund the Warm Hand of Friendship for a further 3 years. After this there remains a relatively large unallocated balance in the Council's Anti-Poverty Fund.
- 1.4 Officers have developed a proposal to create a Fuel Poverty Fund set out in section 4 which is proposed to span this winter and next.
- 1.5 If approved by Committee, it is intended to process the credits to Council Tax accounts before Christmas and payments to those exempt from Council Tax early in 2025.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 It is recommended that the Committee approve the proposals developed by officers regarding Fuel Poverty payments to cover this winter and next funded from the unallocated balance in the Anti-Poverty Fund.
- 2.2 It is recommended that the Committee approve the specific proposal relating to the winter of 2024 and note that officers will bring back a proposal for the 2025/26 winter later in 2025.

Alan Puckrin
Chief Financial Officer

3.0 BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- 3.1 The on-going impact of fuel poverty has been a regular issue raised by elected members as part of the regular anti-poverty reports to the Policy & Resources Committee with the last meeting agreeing to extend the Warm Hand of Friendship funding for a further 3 years at a total cost of £360,000.
- 3.2 Announcements by the UK Government and thereafter the Scottish Government regarding changes in the scope of the Winter Fuel Payment (WFP) and Pension Age Winter Fuel Payment (PAWFP), have increased focus on this matter.
- 3.3 Considering the above and with approximately £800,000 remaining to be allocated from the Anti-Poverty Fund, officers have developed a proposal for Committee to consider.
- 3.4 If the proposal is agreed, then this would utilise the majority of the unallocated funds in the Anti-Poverty Fund over a two year period. Elected members need to be aware that this initiative is time limited as it uses Council Reserves and is not a universal provision but rather, remains targeted to those households of pensionable age assessed to be in highest need of support.
- 3.5 Approval has been obtained from the DWP to use their information for the purpose outlined below and a Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA) and Equalities Impact Assessment (EqIA) have been finalised.
- 3.6 It is envisaged that the proposals will assist approximately 1100 households which pay Council Tax and up to 200 who are exempt due to all members of the household being categorised as "Severe Mentally Impaired". Whilst there will be extra administration for the Revenues & Benefits team linked to the proposal, if the proposal to credit Council Tax accounts is supported, this should be manageable without any material impact on core tasks.

4.0 PROPOSALS

- 4.1 It is proposed to utilise the Council's Council Tax Reduction and Housing Benefit records to identify pension age households not in receipt of one of the 7 qualifying benefits; Child Tax Credit, ESA (Income Related), Income Support, JSA (Income Based), Pension Credit Guarantee Credit, Pension Credit Savings Credit, Universal Credit, Working Tax Credit.
- 4.2 Thereafter, it is proposed to provide a credit to the 2024/25 Council Tax account before Christmas which will result in reductions in Council Tax instalments for the remainder of 2024/25 thus freeing up household income to meet fuel bills. Officers propose that the credit is £200 .
- 4.3 For the estimated 200 pension age households which are exempt from paying Council tax due to all chargeable adults being classed as "Severe Mentally Impaired", it is proposed that they be written to and, where required, provide the necessary evidence of qualification by age. It is envisaged that this will be required from 120-130 of the households. A separate form will need to be returned by all 200 with bank details to allow a payment to be made.
- 4.4 The above proposal is recommended to be applied for the winter of 2024 only at this stage to monitor national developments and to allow officers to consider ways by which support could be accessed by those non-pensionable age households in fuel poverty in the winter of 2025.

5.0 IMPLICATIONS

5.1 The table below shows whether risks and implications apply if the recommendations are agreed:

SUBJECT	YES	NO
Financial	x	
Legal/Risk		x
Human Resources		x
Strategic (Partnership Plan/Council Plan)	x	
Equalities, Fairer Scotland Duty & Children/Young People's Rights & Wellbeing	x	
Environmental & Sustainability		x
Data Protection	x	

5.2 Finance

One off Costs

Cost Centre	Budget Heading	Budget Years	Proposed Spend this Report	Virement From	Other Comments
Anti-Poverty Fund	Fuel Payments	2024/26	£600k		Estimated that up to £260k will be needed for the 2024/25 winter

Annually Recurring Costs/ (Savings)

Cost Centre	Budget Heading	With Effect from	Annual Net Impact	Virement From (If Applicable)	Other Comments
N/A					

5.3 Legal/Risk

There are no legal/risk matters to highlight.

5.4 Human Resources

There are no HR matters to highlight.

5.5 Strategic

This proposal supports a number of strategic outcomes in the Council Plan.

5.6 Equalities, Fairer Scotland Duty & Children/Young People

(a) Equalities

This report is being considered under the Corporate Equalities Impact Assessment (EqIA) and an EqIA has been completed and can be accessed via the following link: <https://www.inverclyde.gov.uk/council-and-government/equality-impact-assessments>

5.7 Data Protection

Has a Data Protection Impact Assessment been carried out?

Whilst the assessed risk is low, the proposal does involve processing data held by the Council and as such a DPIA has been reviewed by the Council's Information Governance Officer.

6.0 CONSULTATION

6.1 The Corporate Management Team and Strategic Leadership Forum support the proposals in this report.

7.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

7.1 None.