

ISLE OF ANGLESEY COUNTY COUNCIL

REPORT TO:	THE EXECUTIVE
DATE:	9 JUNE 2014
SUBJECT:	COUNCIL TAX HELP FOR PENSIONERS 2014/2015
PORTFOLIO HOLDER(S):	COUNCILLOR HYWEL EIFION JONES (PORTFOLIO HOLDER – FINANCE)
HEAD OF SERVICE:	RICHARD MICKLEWRIGHT (ACTING HEAD OF FUNCTION – RESOURCES AND SECTION 151 OFFICER)
REPORT AUTHOR: TEL: E-MAIL:	GERAINT H. JONES – REVENUES AND BENEFITS MANAGER 2651
LOCAL MEMBERS:	NOT APPLICABLE

A - Recommendation/s and reason/s

To approve an Isle of Anglesey County Council scheme to help pensioners reduce their Council Tax for 2014/2015 in accordance with the qualifying criteria of entitlement as outlined in the scheme given in Appendix A. The outlined scheme will extend the Welsh Government's Pensioner Grant for 2014/2015 only.

The Welsh Government has abolished the Pensioner Grant for 2014/2015 and subsequent years and has allocated funding, within the Revenue Support Grant, of £90k to the Local Authority to spend how it wishes. For 2013/2014, the Welsh Government allocated a total of £4m to help pensioners who were in receipt of partial Council Tax Reduction support, up to a maximum of £100. The total spent in Anglesey was £83k with additional £5k as administration funding. The grant was means tested.

During 2013/2014, 960 pensioners received support to reduce their Council Tax under the Pensioner Grant scheme, with 690 receiving the maximum entitlement of £100.

B - What other options did you consider and why did you reject them and/or opt for this option?

A number of options were considered :

- To absorb the additional Revenue Support Grant funding into the Council Tax Reduction Scheme to reduce the shortfall in the funding of that scheme. This would have removed the additional Pensioner Grant completely from 2014/2015;
- Not to allocate all the funds transferred into the Revenue Support Grant for the Pensioner Grant e.g. only giving a maximum of £50 and the remaining balance being used to support the 2014/2015 budget strategy. The approved budget for 2014/15 includes provisions of £400k to meet the shortfall in the Welsh Government funding of the Council Tax Reduction Scheme and £90k to meet the cost of the Pensioner Grant. There is, however, no commitment for 2015/2016 onwards with regard to the Pensioner Grant.

- Whether the £90k could be used for other purposes e.g. top up of Discretionary Housing Payments scheme or creation of a future specific hardship fund from 2015/2016 onwards to meet possible additional Council Tax costs to households who currently have their Council Tax costs met in full under the current Council Tax Reduction Scheme. The 2014/2015 budget provides £90k to meet the cost of the Pensioner Grant scheme.
- A review is currently being undertaken by Caerphilly County Borough Council to establish for 2014/2015 and from 1 April 2015 onwards what the intentions of local authorities in Wales are regarding the use of the former Pensioner Grant budget – to date 11 Welsh authorities have responded stating:-
 - 1 not yet decided;
 - 7 apply the Welsh Government’s Scheme of 2013/ 2014 in 2014/ 2015;
 - 1 apply part of the Welsh Government’s Scheme of 2013/2014 in 2014/2015 and the balance to support the 2014/2015 budget strategy;
 - 2 support the shortfall in the Council Tax Reduction Scheme and remove the Pensioner Grant Scheme completely.

All 11 authorities advised no decision had been made as regards 1 April 2015 onwards.

C - Why is this a decision for the Executive?

This Authority, since April 2009 to March 2013, under a scheme approved by the Executive on 6 October 2009, has used grant funding from the Welsh Government to support and provide pensioners with additional support to meet their Council Tax costs. With the introduction of the Council Tax Reduction Scheme in April 2013, the Welsh Government introduced its own pan Wales grant funded scheme administered by local authorities on its behalf. From April 2014 the Welsh Government discontinued with the scheme allowing Authorities to spend the grant money as they wished.

The County Council, on 27 February 2014, in its budget strategy approved a budget of £90k for a Pensioner Council Tax Grant scheme to apply for 2014/2015.

The Executive is required to adopt a scheme to apply for 2014/2015.

CH - Is this decision consistent with policy approved by the full Council?

This scheme is consistent with the County Council’s wishes in its budget strategy for 2014/2015.

D - Is this decision within the budget approved by the Council?

£90k is included in the Authority’s 2014/2015 budget to pay for the cost of the proposed scheme. The cost of the scheme will not exceed £90k.

DD - Who did you consult?		What did they say?
1	Chief Executive / Strategic Leadership Team (SLT) (mandatory)	
2	Finance / Section 151 (mandatory)	
3	Legal / Monitoring Officer (mandatory)	
4	Human Resources (HR)	
5	Property	
6	Information Communication Technology (ICT)	
7	Scrutiny	
8	Local Members	
9	Any external bodies / other/s	
E - Risks and any mitigation (if relevant)		
1	Economic	
2	Anti-poverty	
3	Crime and Disorder	
4	Environmental	
5	Equalities	
6	Outcome Agreements	
7	Other	
F - Appendices:		
Appendix A - Isle of Anglesey Council Tax Pensioner Grant Scheme 2014/2015		
FF - Background papers (please contact the author of the Report for any further information):		
Revenue Support Grant Settlement 2014/2015		

Isle of Anglesey Council Tax Pensioner Grant Scheme 2014/2015

The purpose of the Pensioner Grant Scheme is to award an amount to reduce Council Tax to eligible persons in Anglesey.

Criteria for award:

1. The qualifying age for support is 60. The relevant qualifying date for determining eligibility will be the 30 June 2014. Either the liable person or the partner of the liable person should be at or above the qualifying age as at the specified date.
2. If the qualifying criteria is as at the 30 June 2014, then no further assessment of eligibility is required for the financial year 2014/2015.
3. Persons eligible will qualify for partial Council Tax Reduction, but not the maximum level of support as at the qualifying date.
4. The minimum amount of award to each person will be £5.
5. For the purposes of allocating the assistance, the net liability is calculated as follows:-

The gross Council Tax charged for 2014/2015

LESS:

- a) any discounts or reductions applied under the legislation by the Isle of Anglesey County Council;
 - b) any Council Tax Reduction amounts awarded to the liable persons.
6. An individual will only qualify for assistance once during the financial year and support will be limited to one payment per household.
 7. The amounts awarded will be up to a maximum level of £100 that will apply across all areas of the Isle of Anglesey County Council.
 8. Should the net liability be below the maximum level, then the credit to the Council Tax account will only be up to the net liability.