

ISLE OF ANGLESEY COUNTY COUNCIL

Report to:	EXECUTIVE
Date:	30 MAY 2023
Subject:	COST OF LIVING DISCRETIONARY SCHEME – FINAL REPORT
Portfolio Holder(s):	COUNCILLOR ROBIN WYN WILLIAMS – PORTFOLIO HOLDER – FINANCE, COUNCILLOR GARY PRITCHARD – PORTFOLIO HOLDER – CHILDREN, YOUTH AND HOUSING SERVICE
Head of Service / Director:	MARC JONES – DIRECTOR OF FUNCTION (RESOURCES) / SECTION 151 OFFICER
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Local Members:	

A –Recommendation/s and reason/s**Background Information**

The cost of living crisis continues but the funding detailed in this report was provided by Welsh Government and had to be spent by 31 March 2023. There is no indication at this point that any further funding from Welsh Government will be forthcoming and there is no provision in the Council's 2023/24 revenue budget to provide financial support to residents who continue to face financial hardship.

The Welsh Government provided grant funding to allow the Council to provide help to local residents experiencing difficulties arising from the cost of living crisis. The fund could be used to provide direct grant support to local residents, to fund the purchase of equipment which would lower costs faced by residents over the winter period or to provide funding to local organisations who were also providing support to local residents.

A sum of £585,163 was provided by Welsh Government and, in addition, any underspend from the Cost of Living national scheme could be added to the grant funding received. Under the national scheme, 21,906 residents received a payment of £150. 999 failed to cash the voucher sent to them and, as a result, £149,780 was transferred to the discretionary scheme. This gave a total funding pot of £734,943.

The Executive approved 2 phases to the discretionary scheme (28 June 2022 and 24 January 2023).

The Welsh Government was clear that any funding that had not been spent by 31 March 2023 would have to be returned, although it was acceptable to transfer funding to third party organisations who could continue to use the funding to provide support after 31 March 2023, provided that the funding had been transferred from the Council's bank account.

Phase 1 of the Scheme

Under Phase 1 of the scheme, the following support was provided:-

Scheme	Budget £	Actual Spend £	Number of People Supported	Comment
Ratepayers who were not eligible under the main scheme.	160,000	85,800	505	
Armed Forces Veterans.	10,000	10,000	17 as @ 24/04/23 Spending to date £2,400	The grants were administered through SAAFA. Any unused funding will be retained by SAAFA to provide continued support to veterans after March 2023.
Residents who are moving out of emergency accommodation or who are defined as being in housing need.	50,000	82,207	290 households supported	
Residents who are assessed as facing financial hardship. Anglesey CAB	50,000	50,000	107	The CAB will retain any underspending and continue to make payments to individuals assessed as facing financial hardship after March 2023.
Residents who are assessed as facing financial hardship. J.E.O'Toole Centre	50,000	59,936	222 households supported	Budget was fully spent by 31 March 2023.
TOTAL	320,000	284,943		

Phase 2 of the Scheme

Under Phase 1 of the scheme, the following support was provided:-

Scheme	Budget £	Actual Spend £	Number of People Supported	Comment
Energy Efficiency Packs distributed through the Warm Spaces.	30,000	27,026	369 Energy Packs 315 Air Fryers 269 Slow Cookers	Energy efficiency packs to reduce a household's energy consumption. Reporting to date shows that over 3,500 attendances were recorded at over 420 Warm Space Sessions.
Funding to Anglesey Food Bank to cover salary costs to deal with the incoming demand and continue with rural deliveries.	12,200	12,100	-	Provided funding to extend 2 employees contracts for a period of 3 months. The Council has supported Anglesey Food Bank to secure £100,000 Lottery bid in order to sustain two employees for a period of 2 years.
Samaritans – to help those experiencing mental health issues as a result of the cost-of-living crisis.	10,000	10,000		To cover central costs, volunteers.

Scheme	Budget £	Actual Spend £	Number of People Supported	Comment
<p>Christmas Food Project</p> <p>Each year, the Council and various partners undertake a Christmas food project. In previous years, we have distributed food hampers and gifts. Due to current demands on our services, it was decided that the festive food project for 2022 would be voucher-led. Recipients chose from their supermarkets of choice or local businesses, such as butchers. Residents were referred through professionals which includes health workers, social services, housing, Housing Support Grant providers, North Wales Police, 3rd sector partners and many more.</p>	27,000	19,511	400 households received support	Funding was used to provide Christmas food vouchers.
<p>To provide support to residents with severe medical conditions who face increased heating / electricity costs as a result.</p>	25,000	38,500	<p>17 applications processed</p> <p>Kidney Care Wales – To date, 35 grants have been paid into the chosen energy company of the patients that the health care practitioners have applied on behalf of</p>	<p>£20k was transferred to Kidney Care Wales and £10k to the MS Society. Help was also provided to individuals referred to the Council by the Health Board and Social Services.</p> <p>This funding provided additional support to households having to use electricity in order to either stay alive or maintain a good quality of life. For example, life support machines from home. The Council's Adults and Childrens' Services, Housing Services and BCUHB referred households for this support totalling x 17 applications @ £500 each, which was paid as a fuel voucher.</p>
<p>Funding to providers who provide services funded from the Housing Support grant.</p>	50,000	62,400		<p>Funding was provided to Ynys Môn Homelessness, Cynefin, Wallich Clifford and Medrwn Môn.</p>

Scheme	Budget £	Actual Spend £	Number of People Supported	Comment
Residents using alternative fuel sources. Households who use oil to heat their homes have not received any support from the Government despite a significant rise in the cost of domestic heating oil during 2022.	50,000	30,000	0 requests received to date	Accounts were set up with 2 local oil companies and the funding transferred to the companies. Financial Inclusion Officers ordered heating oil on behalf of residents using the funds deposited.
TOTAL	204,200	199,537		

Additional Projects Funded

In order to ensure that all the funding was used before 31 March 2023, the Director of Function (Resources), in consultation with the Head of Service – Housing and the relevant portfolio holders, authorised the release of funding for the following projects:-

Scheme	Budget £	Actual Spend £	Number of People Supported	Comment
Food Poverty project run by Menter Môn to provide nutritious food that is made here on the Island.	210,743	110,000	As @ 27/4/23 4,141 meals distributed among the 10 freezers (300 Children have benefited from the service thus far)	To purchase community freezers. This project is ongoing and food supplies will last into July 2023.
Community Hubs / Warm Spaces set up by Medrwn Môn.		80,000		To fund the additional costs incurred by local communities in opening up community hubs and warm spaces during the winter
Funding support for foster parents, £300 towards fuel or food.		20,400	68	The Isle of Anglesey County Council is thankful to the 68 foster families that provide both short and long term support to children in care.
Anglesey Good Food project (Bwyd Da Môn).		27,000	This project will occur during 2023-24 and will provide a subsidy to 110 residents that are being supported by either CAB Ynys Môn, our O'Toole team or Financial Inclusion team	The scheme provides a membership approach whereby members pay £5 per week for £20 worth of food in return. The subsidy scheme will provide 110 households to be provided with the first 12 weeks of the scheme for free. The ideal aim is that, week 13 onwards, subsidised recipients becoming paying members @ £5 per week.

Scheme	Budget £	Actual Spend £	Number of People Supported	Comment
Age Cymru Cooking Project.		8,000		To cover salary costs.
Cost of Living (COL) crisis information leaflets.		16,384		35,100 households were provided with the COL leaflet. This meant that digitally excluded residents had access to this information to ensure full support throughout the COL crisis.
TOTAL	210,743	261,784		

Administration Costs

In order to fund any costs incurred by each Council in running the main scheme and the discretionary scheme, an administration grant of £129,890 was provided by Welsh Government. A total of £118,570 was incurred as administrative costs, which covered additional staffing costs within the Council's Benefits Team and Housing Team, postage costs and management fees charged by the third party organisations who assessed applications on behalf of the Council.

Summary

The table below provides a summary of the funding available and how it was used:-

Scheme	Budget £	Actual Spend £	Variance
Phase 1 Discretionary Scheme	320,000	284,943	(35,057)
Phase 2 Discretionary Scheme	204,200	199,537	(4,663)
Additional Projects	210,743	261,784	51,041
Administration Costs	129,890	118,570	(11,320)
TOTAL	864,833	864,833	

Although the Council's use of the discretionary funding was slower than other Welsh Authorities, who decided to simply use the grant funding to award additional grants to specific groups of residents, it provided a more targeted approach which directed the funding to areas which gave a greater benefit to those most in need of support during the cost of living crisis.

All funding has been distributed by the Council in accordance with the Welsh Government's grant conditions, although some organisations have not distributed all the funds they received by 31 March 2023. The organisations will retain any unused funding and can still provide financial assistance to any new applicants who come forward, provided that they meet the requirements relating to the funding provided.

Governance

In August 2022, The Councils' Leadership Team requested a full review of the prevention, early intervention and poverty activities that at the time were undertaken by various officers within various departments. The review enabled the Council to take stock and agree on recommendations for future structures and programmes.

Since the review, a dedicated Programme Manager has been appointed who is leading on the early intervention, prevention and poverty agendas. The Programme Manager has developed an action plan and implemented a formal governance and decision-making structure.

Recommendation

The Executive is requested to note the contents of the report which confirms that all the funding provided by Welsh Government was utilised in accordance with the terms and conditions of the grant.

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 on how best to use the grant, but the options chosen were considered to provide the greatest benefit to those residents on Anglesey who were most in need.

C – Why is this a decision for the Executive?

Apart from noting the contents of the report, no formal decision is required at this point.

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

Not applicable

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

Funding was provided by means of a Welsh Government grant and the expenditure incurred complied with the terms and conditions of the grant and all of the available funding was utilised in accordance with the timetable set by Welsh Government.

Dd – Assessing the potential impact (if relevant):

1	How does this decision impact on our long term needs as an Island?	The grant funding provided short term support to those most in need, but it does not resolve the long term issue residents of Anglesey who continue to suffer from the ongoing cost of living crisis.
2	Is this a decision which it is envisaged will prevent future costs / dependencies on the Authority? If so, how?	The anti-poverty strategy will require future funding.
3	Have we been working collaboratively with other organisations to come to this decision? If so, please advise whom	A number of third sector organisations worked with the Council to deliver the support to Anglesey residents.
4	Have Anglesey citizens played a part in drafting this way forward, including those directly affected by the decision? Please explain how.	Given the short timescale to utilise the funding, there was insufficient time to consult with citizens on how best to use the funding.
5	Note any potential impact that this decision would have on the groups protected under the Equality Act 2010.	Some protected groups received additional support from this funding
6	If this is a strategic decision, note any potential impact that the decision would have on those experiencing socio-economic disadvantage.	The purpose of the grant was to help those facing financial hardship as a result of the cost of living crisis, which tended to be groups that were experiencing socio-economic disadvantage.

7	Note any potential impact that this decision would have on opportunities for people to use the Welsh language and on treating the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language.	No impact, the language choice of the resident played no part in the allocation of funding.
E - Who did you consult?		What did they say?
1	Chief Executive / Leadership Team (LT) (mandatory)	The report was accepted with only minor amendments requested which did not impact on the recommendation set out in the report.
2	Finance / Section 151 (mandatory)	Author of the report
3	Legal / Monitoring Officer (mandatory)	Was part of the LT and had no specific comments in addition to those made by the LT.
4	Human Resources (HR)	Not applicable
5	Property	Not applicable
6	Information Communication Technology (ICT)	Not applicable
7	Scrutiny	The report was not considered by the Scrutiny Committee.
8	Local Members	The scheme was an Anglesey wide scheme and all Members were kept informed of progress through Members' Briefings.
9	Any external bodies / other/s	Not applicable
F - Appendices:		
None		
FF - Background papers (please contact the author of the Report for any further information):		
Executive – 28 June 2022 – Item 9 Executive – 24 January 2023 – Item 8		