

Agenda Item	13b
Report No	CIA/30/19

HIGHLAND COUNCIL

Committee: City of Inverness Area Committee

Date: 30 May 2019

Report Title: Inverness Common Good Fund : Discretionary Scheme for Winter Payments 2019/20

Report By: Joint Report by Depute Chief Executive/Director of Corporate Resources and Inverness City Area Manager

1. Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report follows on from the effective revision of the discretionary Inverness Winter Payments Scheme for 2018/19 and proposes to maintain the same arrangements for the Inverness Winter Payments Scheme for 2019/20.
- 1.2 *Appendix 1* of this report details the number of applications made in each ward and associated child protection indicators. Some examples of good news stories from the 2018/19 winter payment scheme are included in *Appendix 2* of this report.

2.1 Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are invited to agree the following recommendations for the 2019/20 Inverness Winter Payments Discretionary Scheme:
- i. Maintain the single tier payment of £82 to be made to those applicants that satisfy the eligibility criteria for the 2019/20 scheme.
 - ii. Provide an overall budget of £132,000 to take into account the demand from ongoing welfare reforms and energy costs.
 - iii. That the criteria utilised for the 2018/19 scheme as set out in paragraphs 4.1 to 4.4 shall be used as the basis for the 2019/20 scheme.
 - iv. This discretionary scheme is to be made available to residents in the City of Inverness and the Landward areas of the seven City Wards.
 - v. Promote payment by BACS for this discretionary scheme as this is the most secure method of payment for recipients of the payment and the Council alike.

3. Background

3.1 The Inverness Winter Payments Discretionary Scheme (the scheme) is a discretionary scheme designed to support members of the community most in need of financial assistance during the coldest months of the year when extra fuel is needed. At this time of welfare reform, there is still an increasing demand for this type of financial assistance which is expected to continue during 2019/20.

4. Scheme for Winter 2018/19

4.1 An automatic award was made for those aged 90 years or over, and those that received a Scottish Welfare Fund Crisis Grant between 1 December 2018 and 28 February 2019 inclusive.

4.2 Eligibility for the 2018/19 scheme included those in receipt of one of the following benefits listed below:

- Pension Credit Savings Credit (PCSC)
- Income Support (IS)
- Income Based Job Seekers Allowance (JSA IB)
- Income Related Employment and Support Allowance /Incapacity Benefit (ESA IR & IB)
- Universal Credit for non-earners.

4.2 In addition to the criteria set out at paragraph 4.2 above, a resident in the property must have been entitled to one of the following:

- Attendance Allowance
- Disability Living Allowance (middle or high rate care component)
- Personal Independence Payment (daily living component – standard or enhanced rate)
- Armed Forces Independence Payment
- War Pension

4.3 People in receipt of Pension Credit (Guarantee Credit), without the requirement to have a disability benefit, and households with children under the age of 5 years who were in receipt of Income Support, Income Based Job Seekers Allowance, Income Related Employment and Support Allowance or Universal Credit are eligible for the scheme.

4.4 With the exception of those described in paragraph 4.1, all applicants were required to confirm that there were no people in the household in receipt of a wage at the time of the application or in the previous 6 months, and no-one in the household had capital in excess of £6,000.

4.5 During winter 2018/19, **1,517** households received payments totalling

£124,394 against a budget of **£132,000**. **1,125** residents in Inverness City received a discretionary award and **392** residents in the Landwards areas benefitted from these payments. Funding comprised **£92,052** from the Common Good Fund plus a **£24,342** contribution from the Benevolent Funds.

4.6 A breakdown of award by category is provided in table 1 below.

Table 1 Award by Category Qualifying Criteria	Number of applicants awarded
PCSC, IS, Universal Credit, JSA(IB), ESA(IR), IB plus with additional qualifying criteria	639
Pension Credit Guarantee Credit (PCGC)	609
Children under 5 and in receipt of IS/JSA(IB)/ESA(IR) or UC	118
Over 90 years of age	79
Crisis Grant between 1 st Dec 2018 to 28 th Feb 2019	72
Total number of Winter Payment awards 2018/19	1,517
Received advice from Home Energy Scotland	83

4.7 *Appendix 1* of this report details the number of applications made in each ward and provides an indication of the level of child poverty experienced. Members will wish to note the increased uptake in all wards of the winter payment scheme in 2018/19 compared to 2017/18.

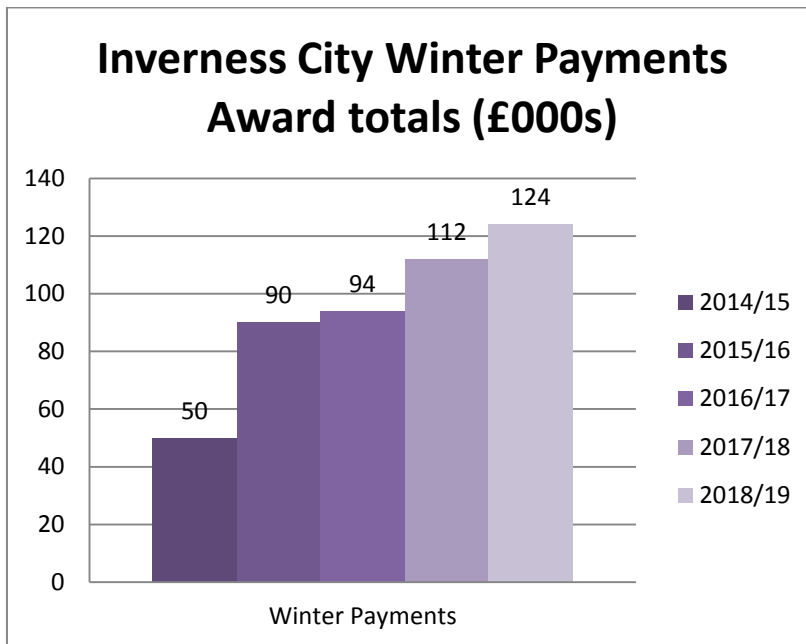
4.8 The administration of this discretionary scheme has been effectively delivered within the Revenues & Customer Services section by the Service Delivery Team since 2015. The single financial assessment enabled automatic awards to be made for 2018/19 **without** the need for applications from households who received payments in the 2017/18 scheme and continued to meet the eligibility criteria.

4.9 Where an applicant qualified in the previous year and it was identified in the pre-qualification checks that the applicants' circumstances had changed, a new form was issued inviting the applicant to re-apply.

4.10 The Council continues to promote and encourage applicants to receive, where appropriate, their payment by BACS as a secure and efficient method for the applicant and the Council alike. For the 2018/19 scheme more than 82% of applicants elected to be paid by BACS, an increase of 12% from the previous year.

4.11 The Council's Welfare Support Team, based within the Revenues & Customer Services section, continues to support the elderly and the most vulnerable members in the community to (re)-apply for this scheme and other entitlements that may be available.

4.12 Since 2014/15 when the Revenues & Customer Services assumed responsibility for the delivery of the scheme, take up has increased by **148%** when comparing 2014/15 to 2018/19.



4.14 Members will wish to note the positive growth year on year which has been achieved through the strategic development of the scheme by the Benefits and Welfare Manager.

5. Scheme Review for Winter 2019/20

5.1 The objectives for the 2019/20 remain the same as in previous years:

- Provide assistance to alleviate hardship being experienced by those people most at risk within the community;
- Establish a discretionary payment level within the resources available, whilst still remaining meaningful to applicants;
- Ensure that the scheme will be sustainable for future years without the need to liquidate Fund assets; and
- Recognise the impact of welfare reform and the changing costs of living expenses, including energy bills.

5.2 It is anticipated the 2019/20 scheme will operate as described in section 4 above and enable the continuation of automatic awards where appropriate. Officers will continue to promote Home Energy Scotland and to encourage applicants to seek advice on energy efficiency.

5.3 The proposal is for the £82 payment rate to be maintained and Members are therefore invited to approve a budget of £132,000 for the 2019/20 discretionary scheme. As in previous years, payments to residents in Landward areas will be met by a contribution from the Benevolent Funds, subject to the availability of these funds.

6. Publicity

6.1 The total cost of publicity for the 2017/18 scheme is detailed below:

Inverness Courier	£1,008.00
Moray Firth Radio	£980.00
Total	£1,988.00

6.2. A multi-channel approach will be used to continue to promote the scheme. This includes a public notice in the Inverness Courier, a news release on Moray Firth Radio, promotion via a prominent space on The Highland Council website and messaging via social media.

6.2 The Welfare Support Team will continue to identify and support customers who meet the scheme's qualifying criteria. Appendix 2 to this report provides examples of the support provided by the team during the 2018/19.

7. Budget management

7.1 The budget will continue to be managed closely including reports to Members as part of the overall budget monitoring process of the Common Good Fund as it is important to manage the expenditure in a manner that safeguards the Common Good Fund's assets and ensures this important scheme remains sustainable.

8. Implications

8.1 **Resource** – resource implications are set out in the main body of the report.

Legal – the type of support and recommendations set out in this policy mean that the Council will be in full compliance with all its legal obligations as it will be putting a Scheme in place that is financially sustainable and meets all audit standards.

Community (Equality, Poverty and Rural) – By being inclusive of both the City and Landward Areas, the scheme will help address the particular needs of urban and rural communities with regard to home heating and energy efficiency. This policy aims to mitigate some of the challenges presented by welfare reform for vulnerable customers.

Climate Change/Carbon Clever – There are no known Climate Change/Carbon Clever Implications

Risk – There are no risk implications.

Gaelic – There are no Gaelic implications.

Designation: Depute Chief Executive/ Director of Corporate Resources and Inverness City Area Manager

Date: 15 May 2019

Author: Sheila McKandie, Benefits and Welfare Manager
Gavin Munro, Policy & Assurance Officer

Background Papers: <http://www.endchildpoverty.org.uk/poverty-in-your-area-2018/>

Appendix 1

Percentage of children in poverty*		Before housing costs**		After housing costs**		Inverness Winter Fuel Payments 2017/18	Inverness Winter Fuel Payments 2018/19	% Uptake increase
Local Authority and wards*		Oct - Dec 2015	Jul - Sept 2017	Oct - Dec 2015	Jul - Sept 2017			
Ward	Highland	11.81%	11.87%	19.17%	19.09%			
12	Aird and Loch Ness	8.80%	10.08%	14.40%	16.34%	98	122	24.5%
13	Inverness West	13.75%	14.13%	22.07%	22.47%	196	223	13.8%
14	Inverness Central	19.54%	19.96%	31.19%	31.16%	540	557	6.9%
15	Inverness Ness-Side	9.19%	10.13%	15.06%	16.42%	147	153	4.1%
16	Inverness Millburn	8.30%	7.32%	13.68%	12.00%	157	199	26.8%
17	Culloden and Ardersier	10.96%	9.23%	17.85%	15.00%	144	154	7.0%
19	Inverness South	6.79%	8.21%	11.17%	13.42%	104	109	4.8%
Totals						1,386	1,517	9.5%

*Data extracted from End Child Poverty report published January 2018

**Housing costs are calculated as 'total income before deducting housing costs' or 'total income after deducting housing costs'. Housing costs includes rents or mortgages. This is used as a measure of poverty as the majority of people will be paying for their home. This expense normally accounts for a significant cost in their monthly bills before paying for everyday essentials.

For example, a household may not be in poverty before they pay housing costs, but after paying, for example a high private rent then they may experience poverty as the majority of their income is being used to pay for their home.

Inverness Winter Payment Scheme 2018/19

Examples of support provided by the Welfare Support Team

A disabled lady in her early 90's who lives alone, in the Inverness Landward area submitted an application for the Inverness Winter Payment Scheme. The application form was not fully completed or signed. The Service Delivery Team referred the case to the Welfare Support Team. Due to the lady's disability and age a Welfare Officer arranged a home visit to fully complete the application form.

The prompt action by the Welfare Officer ensured that the client's application was completed on time and she was awarded the payment of **£82.00** for the Inverness Winter Payment Scheme on the day before the scheme closed.

The Welfare Officer also carried out a benefit check and established that the lady was in receipt all her benefit entitlements and therefore no further action was required.

A disabled, working age gentleman who lives alone the City area of Inverness contacted the Welfare Support Team for advice about the Inverness Winter Payment Scheme.

Following a benefit check a Welfare Officer established that the client was in receipt of ESA (Income Related) and PIP. However, the gentleman was not claiming the extra allowance for the Severe Disability Premium for his ESA.

During a home visit the Welfare Officer supported the client to submit an application for a Severe Disability Premium from the date his PIP Standard Daily Living had been awarded. This application was successful and the client was awarded a lump sum payment of **£1,543.20** and an extra **£64.30 per week** for the Severe Disability Premium.

The Welfare Officer also supported the client to complete an application for the Inverness Winter Payment Scheme and the client was awarded **£82.00**.

The positive impact of the scheme can be highlighted by thank you cards received in the Welfare Support Team from customers who have received the payment. These include:

- *Dear everyone, thank you so very much for the winter fuel payment of £82, I want you to know this is greatly appreciated. Bless you all.*
- *Thank you for the help of £82 to help my heating this winter.*