

Title of Report:	Fuel Poverty Support Scheme
Committee Report Submitted To:	The Leisure & Development Committee
Date of Meeting:	21 June 2022
For Decision or For Information	For Decision

Linkage to Council Strategy (2021-2025)	
Strategic Theme	Healthy, Active and Engaged Communities
Outcome	The Borough comprises cohesive and stable communities which work collaboratively with a range of stakeholders to address issues and deliver on opportunities
Lead Officer	Head of Community & Culture Community Development Manager

Budgetary Considerations	
Cost of Proposal	£0 (100% DfC funding)
Included in Current Year Estimates	YES/NO
Capital/Revenue	
Code	33201
Staffing Costs	n/a

Screening Requirements	Required for new or revised Policies, Plans, Strategies or Service Delivery Proposals.		
Section 75 Screening	Screening Completed:	Yes/No	Date:
	EQIA Required and Completed:	Yes/No	Date:
Rural Needs Assessment (RNA)	Screening Completed	Yes/No	Date:
	RNA Required and Completed:	Yes/No	Date:
Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA)	Screening Completed:	Yes/No	Date:
	DPIA Required and Completed:	Yes/No	Date:

1.0 Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to seek approval from the Leisure & Development Committee to deliver a Fuel Poverty Support Scheme using uncommitted Department for Communities (DfC) Covid fuel poverty related funding.

1.0 Background

During 2020-21 Council received a series of Covid emergency response funds in relation to access to food, connectivity and support for people who were adversely affected financially by the pandemic, including fuel support.

The monies delivered through small grant programmes were initially all committed in a series of grant awards to community and voluntary organisations, however some of these organisations did not claim their grants in full, or in several instances they later returned the funding offer as the needs in their communities or their capability to deliver the projects changed. In addition, some of the Food and Essential Supplies Transition Fund and Warm Well and Connected Fund had not yet been committed.

DfC advised that “any amounts not expended during 2020/21 should be transferred to a usable reserve and ring-fenced for the purposes allocated.” There was no date stipulated for expenditure of any of the 2020/21 unspent grants.

In April 2022 Council agreed to reprofile an amount of £61,946 of uncommitted 2020-21 DfC funding, specifically related to access to food, to support the foodbanks to meet the increasing demand for their services. This was in line with the objectives of the DfC funding, and with the Action Plan developed by the Anti-Poverty Stakeholder Steering Group facilitated by Council.

There is a further amount of uncommitted funding through the DfC Warm Well and Connected Fund, to tackle fuel poverty, and underspend in the second and third strand of the Covid Community Support Fund in the amount of £24,337.

In January 2022 Council approved a recommendation from the Leisure and Development Committee to set up a Fuel Support Scheme utilising 201-22 funding from the Department for Communities for Covid recovery to support vulnerable households experiencing financial hardship as a result of the pandemic.

The Fuel Support Scheme operated through process of referral to the local advice centres by foodbanks and other support organisations or by self-referral at the advice centre. The advice centres carried out an assessment of need and the household was provided with immediate fuel relief in the form of electric or gas meter top ups to the value of £50 or direct oil delivery of an amount of 200l or 300l depending on household size. Discretion was applied in relation to individual circumstances to allow both electric and oil support.

230 households were supported through the scheme during the period that it operated from January to March 2022 and beneficiaries were also able to access wraparound advice, such as benefits checks, debt advice and budgeting support.

3.0 Current position

Given the stark rise in households struggling with the cost of living increase particularly in relation to energy costs, as reported by the Anti-Poverty Stakeholder Steering Group partners, it is now proposed that Council utilise the £24,337 remaining from 2020-21 DfC Covid related funds to roll out the Fuel Support Scheme again. DfC has advised that the funding can be used for this purpose.

It is proposed that the scheme will follow the same model as that which was delivered between January to March 2022 with assessments of need being carried out by Community Advice Causeway through their existing contracted Generalist Advice Service. The operation of arranging the energy top ups and oil deliveries will be procured according to Councils Procurement Policy.

4.0 Recommendation

That the Leisure and Development Committee recommends to Council the delivery of a Fuel Poverty Support Scheme using uncommitted Department for Communities (DfC) Covid related funding to the value of £24,337.