

<b>Title of Report:</b>	<b>Update on DfC Funding &amp; Poverty Support Measures</b>
<b>Committee Report Submitted To:</b>	Leisure & Development Committee
<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	20 September 2022
<b>For Decision or For Information</b>	For Information

<b>Linkage to Council Strategy (2021-2025)</b>	
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

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

<b>Screening Requirements</b>	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 provide an update for Elected Members on Social Supermarket Support Fund monies received from Department for Communities (DfC) and other measures that Council is currently providing, along with partners on the Anti-poverty Stakeholder Steering Group, to alleviate the cost of living pressures.

## **2.0 Background**

During the past 2 years 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.

Council facilitated the setting up of an Anti-Poverty Stakeholder Steering Group (APSSG) in December 2020 which brings together voluntary organisations that are directly addressing poverty along with relevant statutory bodies. The APSSG has developed an action plan and delivered several initiatives including a 'Where to Turn' campaign to promote awareness of support services that are available for people who find themselves struggling financially.

The Department for Communities has directly operated a Social Supermarket (SSM) Pilot Programme since October 2017 and one of the 5 pilot social supermarkets is operated by Vineyard Compassion in Coleraine.

Following positive evaluation of the Social Supermarket Pilot Programme the Minister has approved an approach which will expand the concept to all council areas using a co-design process to develop tailored models that best meets the needs of local communities and builds on the existing structures and partnerships.

## **3.0 Social Supermarket Support Fund**

Funding from the Department's 2022/23 Welfare Reform budget has been provided to Councils through a Social Supermarket Support Fund (SSMSF) to support the co-design of a social supermarket model in the council area to completion and implementation. The amount awarded to Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council is £33,354.50.

The aim of a social supermarket model is to offer a longer term and sustainable response to food insecurity by seeking to help address the root causes of poverty rather than short term crisis provision. This is achieved through the provision of a referral network of wraparound support which includes, but is not limited to, advice on debt, benefits, budgeting, healthy eating, housing, physical and mental health referral, along with education, training and volunteering opportunities to enhance employability skills.

The Social Supermarket Support Fund provides the opportunity to take the learning from the DfC (SSM) Pilot Programme and the Covid response and work with local Councils, the community and voluntary sector and wider stakeholders to move away from the emergency response to a more sustainable, long-term response to food poverty.

Council is working with partners in the Anti-poverty Stakeholder Steering Group and other stakeholders to develop a model for building on the existing pilot and expanding the provision in Causeway Coast and Glens. Proposals resulting from the co-design work for the future social supermarket model within the council area will be reported to the Leisure & Development Committee and must then be submitted to the Department prior to moving to implementation. A list of members of the Anti-Poverty Stakeholder Steering Group members is attached at **Annex A**.

## **4.0 Current and planned measures to alleviate cost of living pressures**

The impact of the cost of living crisis continues to grow, and a recent study by the University of York suggests that more than 76% of households in Northern Ireland are expected to be in fuel poverty in January 2023. Council has put the following initiatives in place, working in

partnership with the APSSG members, to help provide support to people who are experiencing financial difficulty:

#### **4.1 Funding for Foodbanks**

In April 2022 Council agreed to provide an amount of £61,946 remaining from DfC Covid 'Access to Food' funding to support the foodbanks to meet the increasing demand for their services. An amount in excess of £15,000 was provided to the established foodbanks in Ballycastle, Ballymoney, Causeway and Roe Valley. Each of these foodbanks connect with voluntary organisations and churches in the surrounding area to provide outreach food support.

#### **4.2 Fuel Support Scheme**

In June 2022 Council agreed to allocate a final amount of £24,337 of DfC Covid response funding to rerun the Fuel Support Scheme to support people who were experiencing financial difficulty and unable to afford fuel or energy costs. The Scheme, which previously ran earlier in the year, will operate through a 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 will carry out an assessment of need and eligible households will be provided with immediate fuel relief in the form of electric or gas meter top ups or direct oil delivery. 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, benefits checks, debt advice, budgeting support etc.

#### **4.3 Energy Efficiency/ Affordable Warmth**

Councils Energy Efficiency Officers have referred 170 households since the beginning of April to the Affordable Warmth Grant, where up to £7,500 is spent on upgrading heating systems, insulation and windows. Officers have referred 81 households since the beginning of April for Northern Ireland Sustainable Energy Programme (NISEP) grants for cavity wall insulation and loft insulation. Referrals are also made for NISEP grants for heating which can be either fully funded or 50% funded. A Boiler Replacement scheme is also available for those that don't qualify for the other grants, with £400-£1000 available towards the cost of a new boiler. Both the Affordable Warmth grant and NISEP heating grants have large waiting lists at the minute.

Energy Efficiency Officers carried out 72 home visits in July and August with a Thermal Imaging camera, giving advice on how to try and reduce bills. Draught proofing strips, chimney balloons and hot water cylinder jackets have also been provided to households where required. Officers will make available Keep Warm packs from October to February.

#### **4.4 Advice Service**

Council contributed an amount of £128,118 for 2023-24 for Generalist Advice Services in the Borough to provide free, independent and impartial advice on benefits, housing, employment, family matters, consumer issues. This contribution is matched by DfC and the service is contracted to Community Advice Causeway(CAC), and services are delivered in the Dungiven area by Glenshane Community Development (GCD). CAC have extended their services to cover the part of the contract that was delivered by LCDI in the Limavady area as their Advice Centre has ceased to operate. Further DfC specialist advice services are delivered by Community Advice Causeway in relation to Welfare Reform and Debt Advice. In the first quarter of 2022-23, 7,988 enquiries were dealt with for 2,733 clients. 64.7% of these enquiries related to benefits and an amount of £1,159,808 was generated as additional benefits income into the Borough.

#### **4.5 Where to Turn campaign**

'Where to Turn' is a Council campaign to raise awareness of the emergency support services that are available for people experiencing financial difficulty. Hard copy leaflets and a digital version are available and have been promoted through APSSG partners including Multi-Disciplinary Teams as well as on bus shelters and adshels. A further campaign is being planned for the autumn to link with schools and faith based organisations. Full details of support organisations including foodbanks, advice centres etc can be found at:

[www.causewaycoastandglens.gov.uk/advice](http://www.causewaycoastandglens.gov.uk/advice)

#### **4.6 Neighbourhood Renewal projects**

Council continues to provide support to community groups in Neighbourhood Renewal (NR) areas in Coleraine and Limavady that have been dealing with poverty and addressing inequalities for many years. The cost of living rise has resulted in increased costs for both service users and the community groups providing those services.

The Neighbourhood Renewal Partnerships & groups have put the following interventions and support measures in place in the last few months:

- Working closely with the Anti-Poverty Steering Group and its members.
- School uniform give-aways (six NR funded groups are involved in ongoing uniform schemes).
- Emergency food provision (six groups have provisions in place for emergency food – eg, food cupboards, dinner deliveries and luncheon clubs).
- Clothing banks (two groups have a clothing bank – separate from their uniform provisions).
- Mental health support (all groups have mental health links / programmes and two run specific counselling programmes).
- Emergency fuel provision (with other borough wide programmes) – referrals to St. Vincent de Paul or Salvation Army; provision of winter warmer packs; five groups were involved with fuel vouchers last year.
- Sustainable food programmes – slow cookers, 'cooking on a budget' classes; five groups ran these schemes, with more planned.

#### **4.7 Warm Spaces at Council Arts Centres**

Flowerfield and Roe Valley Arts Centres are offering a 'Warm Space' for everyone this wintertime. People are invited to come along and enjoy the designated Warm Spaces in both centres from September to December, where they'll find books, newspapers, tea/coffee, board games and drawing materials for children in a warm and welcoming environment. Whether you want to quietly read a book, the papers or knit and natter, families and individuals, young and old, are all welcome to share our Warm Spaces this winter.

The Warm Spaces are comfortable rooms set aside every Wednesday and Thursday from 1-4pm, 7-9pm and Saturdays 10am-1pm to coincide with existing opening times of both arts centres, therefore maximising the use of the facilities to those who need support.

#### **4.8 Social Inclusion/ Connections Grant**

The Community Development team have reviewed the Social Inclusion Grant which provided small grants of £500 for inclusion projects. Mindful of the growing levels of loneliness and social isolation and the impact this has on physical and mental health, Council's Community Development team lobbied and is now collaborating with the

Northern Health & Social Care Trust through the Causeway Coast and Glens Loneliness Network to recognise the important role that community groups and voluntary organisations play in creating connecting opportunities and reaching out to people who are experiencing loneliness in our communities. One of the objectives of the grant will be to address the social isolation that can result from living in poverty. As a result of the collaboration, additional budget has been secured for the grant programme. Discussions are ongoing with the Western Health & Social Care Trust and the GP Multi-Disciplinary Teams to extend this collaboration. Full details, when finalised, will be brought to Leisure & Development Committee with the annual Council Grants Programme.

## **5.0 Anti-poverty Stakeholder Steering Group**

At their last meeting on 19<sup>th</sup> August, the APSSG discussed a request from NILGA for feedback about what local government can do to help in alleviating cost of living pressures, and the key things that could be done to alleviate pressure on individuals and families at both NI Executive and UK Government levels as well as looking at good practice.

Members highlighted the very real impact of the cost of living pressures on the people they are supporting, such as older people looking to come out of retirement to return to work.

Members highlighted that this is not a temporary crisis and won't be resolved in the short term. While there are good examples of local emergency support services such as foodbanks, advice centres, community fridges, school uniform schemes, baby banks, hygiene banks and fuel stamp schemes provided by voluntary and charitable organisations, this is only a 'sticking plaster' that shouldn't be normalised, and what is needed is structural change and peoples incomes to increase and energy prices properly capped. People are accessing the services, they can budget effectively and are getting all the benefits they are entitled to, but they are still struggling. There are concerns that, as a much larger section of the population are impacted, the existing voluntary organisations will not be able to cater for the demand on their services.

Some of the suggestions as to what Council could do are:

- Continue to support voluntary and community organisations to provide vital services to local communities. These organisations are experiencing a similar increase in the costs of providing their services.
- Continue to promote the services that are available through awareness campaigns and support the connection of services to ensure wraparound support. Connecting and collaborating are key to effective delivery of support.
- Open Council venues such as leisure centres and community centres as warm spaces which would also address the loneliness and isolation challenge that we are trying to tackle.
- Extension of allotment space for individuals, and support for community provided allotments, through mens' sheds and other community groups.
- Engage with Council staff to gauge staff concerns about the cost of living pressures, possibly through a staff survey.
- Use power to lobby both NI Executive and UK Government.

## **6.0 Next Steps**

As part of this process, Community & Culture staff and representatives from the Anti-Poverty Steering Group, facilitated through Council, will be holding a Councillor's workshop **on the 12<sup>th</sup> October at 6pm.**

This workshop will both feed into the consultation by NILGA regarding the potential role Council could play and the key issues and actions for government to consider, in order to help

alleviate the cost of living crisis, and form the basis of an L&D report in November for Council's consideration.

The workshop will also provide an overview of the current issues/challenges local providers such as foodbanks, advice organisations and other support organisations are experiencing from the lived experience of service users/clients.

## **Annex A: Causeway Coast and Glens Anti-Poverty Stakeholder Steering Group members**

Ballycastle Foodbank  
Ballymoney Foodbank  
Vineyard Compassion  
Reset Social Supermarket  
Limavady Community Development Initiative (LCDI)  
Community Advice Causeway  
St Vincent de Paul  
Salvation Army  
Limavady Neighbourhood Renewal Partnership Board chairperson  
Coleraine Neighbourhood Renewal Partnership Board chairperson  
Northern Health & Social Care Trust (NHSCT) Head of Community Wellbeing  
NHSCT Health and Well-being Locality Lead  
NHSCT Poverty Lead  
Western Health & Social Care Trust (WHSCT) Involvement Lead, Health Improvement, Equality and Involvement Department  
Public Health Agency  
NHSCT/Causeway GP Federation Multi Disciplinary Team (MDT) Social Work lead  
WHSCT MDT Social Work lead  
WHSCT MDT Social Worker Limavady  
Department for Communities (DfC) Access to Food team  
Education Authority Youth Service  
CCGBC Community & Culture  
CCGBC Neighbourhood Renewal  
CCGBC Community Development  
CCGBC Energy Efficiency  
CCGBC Labour Market Partnership  
CCGBC Community Planning