

## **FLINTSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL**

**REPORT TO:** **CABINET**

**DATE:** **TUESDAY, 10 JULY 2012**

**REPORT BY:** **HEAD OF FINANCE**

**SUBJECT:** **COUNCIL TAX GRANTS FOR PENSIONERS**

### **1.00 PURPOSE OF REPORT**

- 1.01 To provide cabinet with information and recommendations on the continuation of a Welsh Government Grant Scheme in 2012-13 that enables the Council to operate a local scheme which provides financial assistance to pensioners to pay their Council Tax.

### **2.00 BACKGROUND**

- 2.01 For the past three years, the Welsh Government has provided a grant scheme, targeted specifically to pensioners liable to pay Council Tax.

- 2.02 During 2011-12, the grant scheme enabled the Council to provide over 8,250 individual grant awards to pensioner households with the maximum level of grant award set at £18.50 based on the funding that was made available. To qualify for an award, pensioners were required to be either in receipt of partial Council Tax Benefit or have applied directly to the Council for an award under the Council's 'Apply on Advert' campaign that featured in the 'Your Community Your Council' publicity in early September.

- 2.03 The Minister for Local Government and Communities announced in late May 2012 a further £4m funding package across Wales (the same level as in 2011-12) to enable local authority pensioner grant schemes to continue for a further year. In line with the older adults formula used in the calculation of the Standard Spending Assessment, Flintshire has been allocated grant funding of £164,158 during 2012-13.

- 2.04 To access the latest round of funding, the Council was required to confirm its proposed scheme within a very short window of opportunity and by no later than 30<sup>th</sup> June 2012. The Head of Finance has provisionally secured the funding from the Welsh Government pending the approval of this report at cabinet.

- 2.05 In accepting the latest round of funding, there is an additional requirement for local authorities under this year's scheme to provide taxpayers who benefit from grants with details of the UK

- 2.06 Government's agenda to localise Council Tax support from 2013-14. The Council is currently in discussion with officials from the Welsh Government and other local authorities to coordinate how best to deliver the message of the localisation of Council Tax support and wider welfare reform. This will be done when further information is made available about a potential replacement Council Tax support scheme that will operate in Wales from April 2013.

### **3.00 CONSIDERATIONS**

- 3.01 The 2012-13 grant funding is at a similar level to the previous year and given the positive outcomes of the previous scheme whereby over 8,250 pensioners benefit from a small grant towards Council Tax, it is proposed to continue with the same scheme as previously adopted.
- 3.02 In order to qualify for a fixed grant award in 2012-13, which will be credited against Council Tax accounts, having the effect of marginally reducing monthly instalments, pensioners are required to :-
- Be liable to pay Council Tax at a property in Flintshire which is their sole or main residence on the 30<sup>th</sup> September 2012; **and**
  - Be aged 60 years or over on the 30<sup>th</sup> September 2012 and be in receipt of State Retirement Pension; **and either**
  - Be in receipt of Council Tax Benefit on the 30<sup>th</sup> September 2012 but not in receipt of 100% Council Tax Benefit; **or**
  - Have responded to and qualified for a grant award under the Council's previous 'Apply on Advert' campaigns and not be in receipt of any Council Tax Benefit on the 30<sup>th</sup> September 2012; **or**
  - Have responded to the Council's latest 'Apply on Advert' campaign by 30<sup>th</sup> September 2012 designed to target new applications from pensioners who meet the scheme criteria but have not qualified or applied previously; **or**
  - Have responded to the Council's 'Apply on Advert' campaign after 30<sup>th</sup> September 2012 but before 31<sup>st</sup> March 2013 and meeting all other qualifying conditions. This element of the scheme is designed to provide a 'ring fenced' contingency fund to deal with late applications on a 'first come first served' basis.
- 3.03 The continuation of this scheme will provide an opportunity for all pensioners liable to pay Council Tax to apply for an award. Individual awards, in reality, are likely to remain fairly small in value given the number of applications qualifying previously together with the potential for new applications. The awards will have the effect of reducing monthly or weekly instalments marginally in most cases.
- 3.04 All grants will be fixed at a level when the total number of applications is known after the 30<sup>th</sup> September 2012 deadline date for new applications, allowing for a contingency to support up to 100 late

applications.

#### **4.00 RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 4.01 That cabinet agree to adopt the Pensioner Grant Scheme in 2012-13 as detailed in the report.

#### **5.00 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.01 The Welsh Government has provided an administrative grant of £5,000 to partly cover the additional costs associated with the implementation of the 2012-13 schemes.
- 5.02 The overall grant awards will be cost neutral to match, as far as possible, the £164,158 funding provided by the Welsh Government.

#### **6.00 ANTI POVERTY IMPACT**

- 6.01 The purpose of the grant scheme is part of the Welsh Government strategy to help combat poverty, particularly with pensioners. The continuance of this scheme in 2012-13 will provide some low level financial assistance to those pensioners who are either in receipt of partial Council Tax benefit or who apply for a grant award.

#### **7.00 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT**

- 7.01 None

#### **8.00 EQUALITIES IMPACT**

- 8.01 None

#### **9.00 PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS**

- 9.01 None

#### **10.00 CONSULTATION REQUIRED**

- 10.01 None

#### **11.00 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN**

- 11.01 The Welsh Government has previously held discussions with the Welsh Local Government Association in relation to the introduction of this scheme.

#### **12.00 APPENDICES**

- 12.01 None

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION ACT) 1985**  
**BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**

Section 31 of the Local Government Act 2003  
Welsh Government - Help for Pensioner Grant – May 2012

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