

FLINTSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

REPORT TO: **CABINET**

DATE: **TUESDAY, 17 JUNE 2014**

REPORT BY: **CHIEF OFFICER (COMMUNITY & ENTERPRISE)**

SUBJECT: **PENSIONER DISCOUNT SCHEME**

1.00 PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.01 To provide Cabinet with information on the proposed implementation of a revised Pensioner Grant scheme in 2014-15 to those Council Tax payers in receipt of partial awards under the Council Tax Reduction Scheme (CTRS).

2.00 BACKGROUND

2.01 For the past five years, the Welsh Government has provided local authorities with funding to operate grant schemes to help pensioners pay their Council Tax.

2.02 In 2012-13 the grant scheme adopted by Flintshire provided 8,700 grant awards to pensioner households using a combination of qualifying conditions. The awards were generally open to all pensioners, irrespective of their financial circumstances but were relatively small in value at £18.50 due to the high number of applications received, especially from those pensioners who had responded to the Councils 'apply on advert' campaign.

2.03 In 2013-14, the Welsh Government prescribed a new national grant scheme, with a targeted approach to provide a grant to those pensioners who already receive partial awards under the CTRS scheme.

In Flintshire 2,233 households qualified for funding of up to £100, although some households received less due to their net Council Tax liability being less than £100.

2.04 The Welsh Government have decided that they will not operate a national grant scheme for 2014 -15, however within the Revenue Support Grant they have included £201,700 identified for the funding of a pensioner grant scheme at the discretion of each Authority.

3.00 CONSIDERATIONS

- 3.01 The Welsh Government has not stipulated that the grant should be paid to Pensioners, however a review of North and Mid Wales LA's shows that all are proposing to pay the grant with the exception of Wrexham and Denbighshire.
- 3.02 The grant was identified and the intention to pay the grant was approved by Council within the 2014/15 budget.
- 3.03 The 2013 – 14 national scheme removed local variations, both in the value of awards and who received the awards. The scheme was designed to attempt to mitigate some of the impacts of Welfare Reform and provide assistance for all pensioner households who were in receipt of partial CTRS. The reduction in eligible applicants permitted a higher award to those pensioners who had been identified by their qualification for a means tested benefits as the group most likely to have been affected by Welfare reform.
- 3.04 Data analysis work has calculated that there are 2,204 households in Flintshire, who are in receipt of Council Tax Reductions and would qualify for funding.
- 3.05 It is not possible to identify the number of pensioners who would qualify if restrictions on applicants were not introduced however statistics from 2012-13 would indicate a minimum of 8,700 applicants which would reduce grant to £23.18 per applicant.
- 3.06 Revenues and Benefits Senior Officers have assessed the potential demands and funding availability to produce a criteria which was based on the continuation of the 2013/14 Welsh Government Scheme to ensure continuity and an equitable distribution of the grant, targeted to those taxpayers in most need of financial help.

4.00 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.01 That cabinet note the revised funding availability for a Pensioner Grant Scheme and agree a scheme for Flintshire for 2014-15.
- 4.02 That Cabinet approves the following scheme as prepared by Revenues and Benefits Senior Officers.

4.03 Pensioner Grant Scheme

That the grant is only payable to pensioners who fulfil the criteria at the qualifying date of 30th June

A maximum award of £95. The qualifying criteria is:

Either the claimant or the partner to the claimant has reached the age of 60 and is liable for Council Tax at a property which is deemed to be a 'sole and main' residence, and

The claimant qualifies for partial Council Tax Support, but not the maximum level of support on the qualifying date and there is a net liability to Council Tax (after any other discounts or reductions, for example single person discount or disabled banding relief).

Should the net liability be below the £95 maximum level of award then the credit to the Council Tax account will only be up to the net liability.

The minimum award will be £10.

Grant awards will be automatically credited to the Council Tax accounts of qualifying households during July 2014.

5.00 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

5.01 The Council will receive funding of £201,700 in order to make the awards.

The overall grant awards will be cost neutral to match the level of funding.

5.02 In previous years the Welsh Government have identified £5,000 within the grant to administer the scheme (staff time, revised Council Tax bills, printing and postage costs), this grant has not been identified separately within the 2014/15 settlement but a similar allowance will be used to administer the scheme during 2014-15.

6.00 ANTI POVERTY IMPACT

6.01 The proposed scheme is specifically designed to help pensioner households, who have been assessed as being in need of financial assistance and who already receive some help with paying their Council Tax.

7.00 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

7.01 None.

8.00 EQUALITIES IMPACT

8.01 None.

9.00 PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

9.01 Additional officer time will be required to administer credits to account and respond to enquiries but this will be contained within current staffing levels.

10.00 CONSULTATION REQUIRED

10.01 None.

11.00 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN

11.01 None.

12.00 APPENDICES

12.01 None.

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

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