

Hambleton District Council

Report To: Cabinet

Date: 6 December 2022

Subject: **Hardship Relief**

Portfolio Holder: Leisure
Councillor P R Thompson

Wards Affected: All Wards

1.0 Purpose and Background

- 1.1 For Cabinet to consider the following three proposals to provide targeted financial support to those facing the greatest impact from the cost-of-living crisis:
- 1.1.1 Financial support for food banks to increase provision of food for those in food poverty.
 - 1.1.2 A Warm Place grant scheme to enable community venues to offer a warm space for people who are in fuel poverty and struggling to heat their home.
 - 1.1.3 Additional funding to top-up the Discretionary Housing Payment Fund for 2022/23.
- 1.2 Whilst all households are affected by the current cost of living crisis the impact is most severe in lower income households who have to pay a greater proportion of their income on essentials such as food and fuel.
- 1.3 The current crisis is exacerbating pre-existing financial difficulties affecting many of those still recovering from the effects of the pandemic.
- 1.4 Across Hambleton there are three key organisations who are providing food support; Hambleton Foodshare which provides food parcels for residents in Northallerton, Bedale, Stokesley and Great Ayton; Community Works providing food parcels for residents in Thirsk; and Easingwold and District Community Care Association who provide a hot meals service for local residents. The proposal is therefore to provide some additional funding to assist them during this cost-of-living crisis.
- 1.5 Also, during the last few months several community organisations have asked for support to provide warm spaces this winter for vulnerable people who are struggling to heat their homes. A community grants scheme, for between £100 and £500, to support community venues that wish to provide a warm welcoming space for people to socialise, and perhaps enjoy some additional activities, would greatly benefit those who need it most.

- 1.6 Discretionary housing payments provide extra financial support towards housing costs and are paid by the Local Authority to customers who can demonstrate they are unable to meet their housing costs from their available income or they have a shortfall in their housing costs. Customers must be receiving Housing Benefit or Universal Credit to be eligible for support.
- 1.7 The budget is set year each year and the number of applicants varies due to changing economic and social factors. Although the Department for Works and Pensions has allocated £78,091 to Hambleton for the 2022/23 financial year, this is a reduction of 29% on the previous year's allocation.
- 1.8 The scheme has been in place for several years and the team have built up local knowledge and expertise to help profile the DHP budget to meet demand during the year and does explore and work with other departments such as Housing, to see what alternative support is available to avoid potential overlap and reduce demand.
- 1.9 To date, the Council has spent or is committed to spend £61,000 leaving £17,000 for the remainder of the financial year 2022/23.
- 1.10 Monitoring of the spend shows that requests for support have increased for the following reasons:
- landlords issuing notices seeking possession of the property, now the suspension in place during the pandemic has been lifted
 - removal of the £20 per week Universal Credit uplift
 - increase in fuel costs, including those on prepayment meters
 - current cost of living crisis, impacting on customers' ability to feed their family and pay the shortfall in their rent liability
- 1.11 It is expected that this fund will have been used up by the end of December and therefore additional funds will be needed to support residents for the remainder of this financial year.
- 1.12 In addition to the government funding provided, local authorities can top-up the funding to a maximum of 2.5 times of the allocated amount. For Hambleton this would be a maximum £191,263, however, based on the current monthly expenditure it is estimated that £30,000 should be sufficient to support applications to 31 March 2023, taking the overall total for the year to circa £108,000.
- 1.13 Due to economic and social factors, is difficult to predict the number of future applications and the level of financial support needed, however is not anticipated that funding will be needed to the full level of top-up that can be made.

2.0 Link to Council Priorities

- 2.1 These three proposals link to the Council's Enhancing Health and Wellbeing priority as they will provide support for those residents in most need with food, places to keep warm and housing costs which will have a positive impact on people's physical and mental health.

3.0 Risk Assessment

3.1 The key risk is in not approving these proposals:

Risk	Implication	Gross Prob	Gross Imp	Gross Total	Preventative action	Net Prob	Net Imp	Net Total
Vulnerable people's health will decline	Poor physical health leading to other impacts that affect mental wellbeing	3	4	12	Additional support for food banks and warm places.	2	3	6

Prob = Probability, Imp = Impact, Score range is Low = 1, High = 5

4.0 Financial Implications

4.1 The proposal is to provide £30,000 financial support for the food support organisations identified in 1.4 and up to £30,000 for a Warm Places fund for voluntary and community groups seeking to provide warm venues for vulnerable people. A further £30,000 is required to top-up the Discretionary Housing Payment Fund for 2022/23.

4.2 It is proposed that these three initiatives would be funded from reserves.

5.0 Legal Implications

5.1 All grant recipients must adhere to terms and conditions to ensure they comply with relevant legal requirements and the Council's terms and conditions associated with their grant.

6.0 Equality/Diversity Issues

6.1 Equality and diversity issues have been considered, however there are no issues associated with this report.

7.0 Recommendations

7.1 It is recommended that Cabinet:

- (1) approves £30,000 to support food support organisations identified in paragraph 1.4 of the report;
- (2) approves £30,000 to create a Warm Places grants fund, with the detail of the terms and conditions being delegated to the Director of Leisure and Communities; and
- (3) approves £30,000 to top-up the existing allocation for the Discretionary Housing Payment Fund for 2022/23.

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Background papers: None
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