

## **Gwynedd Council Cost of Living Support Scheme (COLSS) Discretionary Fund**

As part of the Welsh Government's Supplementary Budget on 15 February 2022, it was announced that a scheme would be put in place to support households with the cost of living by providing a payment of £150 to certain households. Although this was a Government scheme, local authorities were expected to administer it as eligibility was based on the Council Tax status of the property.

In order to qualify for payment under the scheme a household had to meet one of the following conditions, as set by the Welsh Government:

**Council Tax Reduction Scheme entitlement condition.** If the householder(s) was in receipt of support through the Council Tax Reduction Scheme on 15 February 2022, they are automatically assessed as being entitled to a payment of £150 regardless of the valuation band in which their property is placed.

**Council Tax Band condition.** Households occupying properties in council tax Bands A to D are assessed as being entitled to a payment of £150 provided they satisfy all of the following criteria:

- liable for council tax on a property on 15 February 2022
- not in receipt of an exemption for that property on 15 February 2022
- living in that property as their main or primary residence on 15 February 2022
- responsible for paying the associated utility and other regularly incurred bills for that property on 15 February 2022.

### **Discretionary Scheme**

In addition to supporting the eligible categories outlined above through the main scheme, each local authority may use the funding provided under the Discretionary Scheme to provide support to households it considers to be in need of assistance with their living costs. This support may take the form of a payment to a household not already covered in the main scheme, or it may cover the cost of essential services provided to the household, for example extending the provision of free school meals or meals-on-wheels.

Each local authority will determine how it utilises the available funds.

**Gwynedd Council's Discretionary Cost of Living Support Scheme follows on the next few pages, and is divided into two elements:**

- **Payments of £150 based on Council Tax.**
- **Funding a network of Supporting People Hubs and Food Banks.**

## PAYMENTS OF £150 BASED ON COUNCIL TAX

### Eligible date 15/02/2022

Eligibility for payments will be as follows:

A payment of £150 to be made based on Council Tax data. Most payment categories below would have seen a payment of £150 made to the taxpayers under the two main schemes had they not been exempt from paying Council Tax due to their personal circumstances.

Class N Exemption – Property wholly occupied by students.

Class S Exemption – Property occupied by under 18's,

Class U Exemption – Property occupied by residents designated as having a “Severe Mental Impairment”\*

Class W Exemption – Occupied Annex used by certain dependant relatives

Class X Exemption – Care Leavers under 25

Property in Band F-I qualifying for a band reduction due to disability,

Property in Band E-I where there is a disregard due to “Severe Mental Impairment”\*

Property in Bands E-I where there is a disregard due to caring responsibility,

Property in Band E-I where there is a disregard due to the second qualifying person being an 18 - 19 year old person in Further Education

Properties in Band E-I eligible for a Single Occupier Discount

**These exemptions and reductions listed below deal with circumstances of vulnerability for the individual / family or circumstances where income is restricted.**

\* as defined by the Local Government Finance Act 1992

Where live current bank details are available on the Council Tax account a direct payment will be made into this account.

If there are no live bank details a letter will be issued authorising the eligible person to claim a payment from the Post Office (within 28 days).

If the eligible person does not claim the money a second letter will be sent asking if they require a second Post Office letter or wish to provide their bank details.

If there is no response the money may be placed on the Council Tax account where the individual may claim the £150 as a refund (up to the 31 March 2023).

Any unallocated funds which remain from the expenditure which cannot be set against a Council Tax account will be shared to the Food Bank Hubs by way of a second payment.

## NETWORK OF SUPPORTING PEOPLE HUBS AND FOOD BANKS

Below is set out the use to be made of £300k of the Support People Hubs and Foodbanks element of the Cost of Living Discretionary Fund in line with the definition of "Wider use of discretionary funding" in the guidance.

The activities below will all be carried out before the end of March 2023.

### **1. Contribution towards improving support and support capacity and supporting access to support and assistance.**

We currently have 11 supporting people hubs in communities in partnership with Community Groups and Third Sector Organisations. The Hubs bring partners and some of the Council's support services together into one place to be able to help people with the following:

- Financial and debt advice (CAB, Housing Socialisation, Council Benefits Unit)
- Advice on fuel and household costs (Warm Wales, Housing Department, Groundworks, Housing Associations)
- Access to food vouchers and emergency food packages (Community Pantries, Community Fridge, Food Clubs)
- Access to emergency energy vouchers
- Access to clothing
- Access to household goods and emergency hygiene
- Befriending schemes, keeping in touch and connecting people together for vulnerable residents.
- Access to community transport for appointments, arrival of essential services such as doctor and hospital, shopping and statutory services in towns.
- Support for those most at risk of poverty e.g. unpaid carers, people with disabilities.
- Mental health support to deal with stress, anxiety, depression (Social services, I-can Centres, Mental Health centres, GP Clusters)
- Practical grassroots support to help people to apply for services, schemes, grants on their behalf (welfare workers) from various agencies staffing the hubs.

The hubs support people in specific catchment areas; and open to any person.

The existing hubs are located at –

Caernarfon  
Maesgeirchen  
Penygroes  
Pwllheli (and Nefyn)  
Llanaelhaearn (Trefor and Llithfaen)  
Botwnnog  
Blaenau Ffestiniog (Penrhyndeudraeth and Trawsfynydd)  
Bala  
Bethesda  
Barmouth  
Tywyn

The contribution will go towards setting up local satellites to the above hubs, extending hours, extending staffing capacity, extending the provision of emergency vouchers (food, fuel or goods to the hub's discretion); financial advice provision and feeding provision.

## **2. "Warm Welcome" scheme**

The scheme is an attempt to provide a warm and safe space for residents over the winter months. The space is intentionally somewhere for people to go to keep warm due to the risks of not being able to heat the home.

The Library Service, Youth Service and Housing Associations have signed on to the scheme. Contribution from the fund will go towards providing the space, tea / coffee and promoting the venues to residents.

We will specifically target 3 groups – total population (libraries); people over 55 (community space accommodation and support); young people 16-25 (youth service).

## **3. Food and Feeding Schemes**

We will make a financial contribution to the 5 Food Banks in the county to maintain the food supply, and also to ensure that no food bank turns away a household that needs help due to lack of supply.

We will also be adding to the Food Grant to provide a financial contribution to the various Feeding Groups / Supper Clubs / Lunch Clubs / Meals on Wheels Schemes throughout the county.

## **4. Charis Grant Fund and Aid (fuel poverty)**

Extending capacity to provide fuel poverty advice, fuel vouchers, and access to emergency fuel vouchers from individual energy providers and external charities.

## **5. Gwynedd Anti Poverty Programme**

Contribution towards the costs of employing a Coordinator and Poverty Officer.

Contribution towards cross-partner promotion and marketing activities to raise people's awareness of an existing cost of living support service.