

CORPORATE POLICY & RESOURCES COMMITTEE

16 October 2023



Title	<i>Cost of Living Support Fund</i>
Purpose of the report	To make a decision
Report Author	Stephen Mortimer-Cleevely & Karen Sinclair
Ward(s) Affected	All Wards
Exempt	No
Exemption Reason	N/A
Corporate Priority	Community, Environment and Service Delivery
Recommendations	Committee is asked to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Note the amount of funds available for Cost-of-Living Support.• To decide on the most appropriate and proportionate distribution of these funds (Option 2 is the preferred option)• To agree the proposed governance applied to this fund.
Reason for Recommendation	The Council allocated funds to the aid residents through the cost-of-living crisis, of £200,000 which was set aside in a reserve. In conjunction with colleagues in the Social Care £9,000 was allocated to families with children with life limiting conditions. The Council has £191,000 remaining in the reserve.

1. Summary of the report

- 1.1 Committee is asked to agree on the appropriate use of this fund.
- 1.2 Committee is asked to agree on the governance of this fund.

2. Key issues

The Council has £191,000 available to allocate in the Cost-of-Living Support Reserve. At Community Wellbeing and Housing Committee on 26th September 2023. The Committee are considering, on the Agenda of this meeting, a paper that recommends partial use of this reserve to provide funding for the temporary continuation of the 6 day a week offer at the Council's community centres, for our communities. In total this equates to maximum budget of £42,015 for another year of delivery commencing 1st October 2023. This leaves available £148,985 if the Committee decide that this is an appropriate allocation of this Cost-of-Living Support Reserve. This paper seeks to gain a recommendation as to the proposed allocation and governance of this remaining fund.

An action from the Food & Welfare meeting on 20th September 2023 was to put together a committee report in relation to the Cost-of-Living Fund that has yet to be allocated.

The foodbanks raised that they were aware of its existence and were keen to access this fund as winter approaches.

Officers would like it to be considered as an urgent item, if we miss this committee cycle, we are likely to miss the ability to support the mitigation of the worst of the winter pressures for our residents, through additional support for our community stakeholders.

3. Options analysis and proposal

3.1 The options considered within this report are: -

Option 1 – Do nothing

Retain the money set aside for assisting residents cope with the cost-of-living pressures and do not allocate. This is not recommended as it is clear there is a ongoing and continuing need for local communities to be assisted, particularly as we move back into winter. Mortgage interest rates and rent levels are very high and many people are struggling to pay energy bills and food bills along with council tax liabilities etc.

Option 2– Recommended

Use The Spelthorne Healthy Communities Partnership Board to allocate the remaining money. This Board has representatives from Spelthorne Borough Council, local voluntary sector groups, Health partners, local churches and foodbanks. The Council have previously endorsed the Board as an appropriate body to facilitate money to community groups and organisations most in need. Clear and transparent criteria have been agreed for those applying for funding. Of most importance, the money can speedily be allocated once approval is given. See Appendix 1.

Option 3

Use the existing Council grants panel to agree distribution of the funds. Whilst the grants panel has clear criteria, its objectives are broad and not as focussed on assisting the health and wellbeing as the Spelthorne Healthy Partnerships Board objectives. The grants panel meets annually and makes its recommendations go to full Council around Spring 2024. This would mean the organisations and individuals that need the cost-of-living funding most would not benefit at this critical time of year, going into Winter when heating and other costs rise.

4. Financial implications

4.1 There are none bar additional officer resource. As stated above it is anticipated that there are £148k of uncommitted funds available in the reserves to be deployed. Funds set aside in reserves can only be spent once, unless further funds are set aside in the future.

5. Risk considerations

5.1 Doing nothing in this challenging landscape around food and fuel poverty could result in more challenging circumstances for our residents.

6. Procurement considerations

None identified.

7. Legal considerations

7.1 None yet identified.

8. Other considerations

9. Equality and Diversity

10. Sustainability/Climate Change Implications

10.1 Distribution of these funds through current mechanisms minimises the use of new resources.

11. Timetable for implementation

11.1 ASAP in order to enable the Council and partners to be able to distribute the funds to households in need before winter arrives. The earliest this decision can be finalised is 16th October 2023.

12. Contact

12.1 Stephen Mortimer-Cleevely.

Appendices:

Appendix 1 Spelthorne Healthy Communities Partnership Board Terms Of Reference and Checklist