



Subject:	Update on Hardship Programme 2024/25
Date:	23 August 2024
Reporting Officer:	John Tully, Director of City and Organisational Strategy David Sales, Strategic Director of City Operations
Contact Officer:	Kevin Heaney, Head of Inclusive Growth and Anti-Poverty Brian Carr, Portfolio Manager Nicola Lane, Neighbourhood Services Manager Margaret Higgins, Lead Officer, Community Services

Is this report restricted? Yes No

Please indicate the description, as listed in Schedule 6, of the exempt information by virtue of which the council has deemed this report restricted.

Insert number

1. Information relating to any individual
2. Information likely to reveal the identity of an individual
3. Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the council holding that information)
4. Information in connection with any labour relations matter
5. Information in relation to which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained
6. Information showing that the council proposes to (a) to give a notice imposing restrictions on a person; or (b) to make an order or direction
7. Information on any action in relation to the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime

If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?

After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sometime in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>

Call-in

Is the decision eligible for Call-in? Yes No

1.0	Purpose of Report
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1.1	The purpose of this report is to update Members on recent correspondence from Department for Communities in relation to in-year funding being made available to support delivery of hardship support to those vulnerable people impacted by the cost-of-living crisis across the city.
2.0	Recommendations
2.1	<p>The Committee is asked to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. note the contents of this report including recent response received from the Department for Communities (attached at Appendix 1) ii. note the current budget position (£100,773) in relation to the development and delivery of a hardship programme in 2024/25. iii. note the planned exhibition and awareness event to be held in Belfast City Hall for those agencies and partners who provide support and advice; with invites to be issued to Members.
3.0	Main Report
3.1	Members will recall the updated provided to the Committee in June 2024 on the need for and positive impact of the £1million+ hardship scheme implemented in the 2023/2024 year which was fully funded by the Department for Communities. Members will be aware that the Council fully funded and delivered a £1million Fuel Hardship Programme in 2022/23.
3.2	At the meeting in June, Members had been informed that whilst some underspend from previous years was available to support a hardship programme in 2024/2025, the amount available is £100,773 , which is significantly lower than previous years.
3.3	As agreed by Members, the Council issued correspondence to the Department for Communities seeking confirmation as to whether any in-year funding allocation for hardship would be made available to Council and highlighting the need for a longer-term commitment to such funding by the Department and NI Executive.
3.4	Attached at Appendix 1 for Members information is the response received from the Permanent Secretary of DFC, Mr Colum Boyle. The correspondence states that given the very constrained financial/budgetary position and competing priorities, the Department is currently unable to provide any hardship funding for 2024/25. It also confirms that it would not be possible at this time to consider a recurrent hardship funding model.
3.5	Members will be aware that the Committee has previously agreed significant grant funding to support the social supermarket network across the city which provides direct support to those in need. Members will also note that officers are working with key support agencies across the city to host a exhibition event in City Hall in late October / early November which will acknowledge and showcase

	the important work being done across the city to help people in poverty. The event will enable key service providers and support organisations to network with each other, to explore possibilities to collaborate and importantly to understand the referral pathways to key areas of support which exist for vulnerable people. Elected Members will receive an invite to the event when details are confirmed.
	Financial & Resource Implications
3.6	There is currently £100,773 identified from underspends to support the delivery of a hardship programme in 2024/25.
	Equality or Good Relations Implications / Rural Needs Assessment
3.7	An Equality Screening and Rural Needs Assessment will be undertaken for the delivery of any Hardship Programme for 2024/25.
4.0	Appendices – Documents Attached
	Appendix 1: Correspondence from Department for Communities, dated 31 July 2024