

Agenda Item	8
Report No	LA/17/23

HIGHLAND COUNCIL

Committee: Lochaber Area Committee

Date: 31 October, 2023

Report Title: The Islands Winter Boost Fund 2023/24

Report By: Executive Chief Officer, Communities & Place

1. PURPOSE/EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 The Islands (Scotland) Act 2018 introduced measures to meet the needs and improve the quality of life for island communities

1.2 Island communities already experience higher costs of living, high fuel costs, and a colder climate, which is further intensifying the impact of the cost crisis in island communities.

1.3 The Scottish Government has provided the Highland Council with grant funding to help alleviate the cost crisis in our island communities. This report sets out recommendations for distribution of the share of funding for Lochaber.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 Members are invited to:

- i. Note that the Council has received Islands Winter Boost funding for 2023/24 to help alleviate the impacts of the cost crisis for island communities.
- ii. Agree that this funding be used to automatically make non-recurring cost crisis payments of £127 per eligible household by 28 February 2024 where the Council holds current bank details, in accordance with the eligibility criteria set out in section 4 of this report.

3. IMPLICATIONS

3.1 **Resource** – Funding of £0.105m is required and is deliverable within the grant amount available.

3.2 **Legal/Risk** – The proposed use of this fund satisfies the Scottish Government's conditions of grant as detailed in section 4 of this report.

- 3.3 **Community (Equality, Poverty and Rural)** – The proposal to provide cost crisis payments to eligible households aligns with the Council's commitments and duties relating to equalities, poverty, and rural factors.
- 3.4 **Climate Change/Carbon Clever** – There are no climate change/carbon clever implications arising from this report.
- 3.5 **Gaelic** – There are no Gaelic implications arising from this report.

4 The Islands Winter Boost Fund

- 4.1 This Fund has been developed to specifically recognise and tackle the challenges faced by island communities. This funding is intended to help local authorities support islanders most impacted by the cost crisis. Local authority decisions about the use of this should be based on local knowledge and understanding of the impacts of the cost crisis on their islands.
- 4.2 To enable the share of revenue funding to be distributed promptly while also satisfying the requirements set out at paragraph 4.1 above, it is proposed to make a non-recurring cost of living payment of £127 per household to those in receipt of means-tested council tax reduction and those with a council tax liability who are receiving specified council tax exemptions. The categories of council tax exemptions for this purpose are Cared For, Care Leaver, those under 18 years, and those who are certified as having a severe mental impairment as defined in council tax legislation. The Council's Service Delivery Team will identify all eligible households and make BACS payments automatically, thus removing the need for individuals to apply while also keeping administrative costs to a minimum.
- 4.3 Based on the proposed eligibility criteria set out in paragraph 4.2 above, 12 residents in the Small Isles would be eligible for an automatic non-recurring payment of £127 each. Winter Boost payments are also being made to residents in Skye & Raasay. The total budget required for Winter Boost payments is £0.097m.
- 4.4 £0.008m would be required to meet administrative overheads and to ensure that those households who make a retrospective successful claim for council tax reduction or the specified council tax exemptions as set out in paragraph 4.2 above, will receive a Winter Boost payment from this fund.

Designation: Executive Chief Officer, Communities & Place

Date: 26 October 2023

Author: Sheila McKandie, Head of Revenues & Business Support