

WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL

Report by Executive Director of Corporate Services

Community Participation Committee: 21 January 2009

Subject : Old Peoples' Welfare Grant Funding

1. Purpose

- 1.1** The purpose of this report is to advise the Committee of the current position of the Christmas funding to elderly residents of the area and to put forward alternative options which may be available for the payment of these grants in future years, with a view to discussions and providing feedback to the Corporate and Efficient Governance Committee.

2. Background

- 2.1** The Corporate and Efficient Governance Committee in October 2008 and December 2008 asked that a paper be brought to this Committee for discussion regarding possible alternatives for use of the Old People's Welfare grants budget, with a view to maximising the benefit to as many elderly residents within the Council area as possible. The Council's budget for 2008/09 was £175,680.
- 2.2** There have been a number of adverse comments from elderly people and their families over the inconsistent use of the grant monies. Historically, elderly members from Dumbarton and Alexandria benefit from the grant through social events – such as a Christmas lunch or outing. Whereas, elderly members within the area of the Clydebank Old People's Welfare Organisation (OPW) benefit from a cash payout. The Clydebank OPW covers only part of Clydebank (e.g. excludes Duntocher) and is made up of approximately 25 affiliated old people's groups.
- 2.3** Over the past few years the Council's Finance and ICT Service has become more involved in the grant distribution to the Clydebank organisations. Indeed, since 2006/7, the Council's Finance and ICT Service has actively managed the Clydebank Christmas payout after Member request for help. In being involved in the full process, a number of issues were highlighted – such as, security of staff and the elderly people with such large sums of money; the time required to process the system previously set up; issues affecting the health of the elderly (e.g. waiting in queues, historically outside in winter); public frustration inappropriately voiced at staff.
- 2.4** This has led to staff contacting other local authorities - with a similar payout at Christmas - to identify other processes working more fairly and securely.
- 2.5** A focus group meeting has also been arranged with the Old People's Welfare groups who presently receive a distribution to allow open discussion of the current procedures and possible improvements.

3. Main Issues

- 3.1** There were seven responses received from other local authorities (a list of those authorities is attached for information – Appendix I).
- 3.2** The main method used by others for distributing is via cheque, bank transfer or postal order. However, other options include a credit towards council tax/ rent/energy bills; voucher for a local shop; distribution via local council offices (e.g. registration offices or housing rent offices).Appendix II lists issues for and against each method.
- 3.3** Alternatively, each elderly organisation could continue to receive a grant for use only on social events with no cash payout to any member of the public.
- 3.4** Feedback from the focus group meeting will be reported back to the Corporate and Efficient Governance Committee, along with any comments from the Community Participation Committee.

4. Personnel Issues

- 4.1** If the Council agreed to pay out monies to individual persons, the work involved in getting the required information, producing cheques would be substantial to Council staff.

5. Financial Implications

- 5.1** In 2008/09, the Council budgeted to distribute £175,680 to elderly organisations in the area.
- 5.2** Cheques and postages to individual home addresses would be costly for the Council, taking grant money from the benefit of the elderly. The task of building up an accurate database of details for all individuals (and keeping this up to date, year-on-year) is virtually impossible and definitely not manageable within the required timeframe.

6. Risk Analysis

- 6.1** It is highlighted as a risk to encourage cash payments being handed to elderly on set days and places, known within the community. Risks have also been identified within Appendix II under disadvantages.

7. Conclusions

- 7.1** The Council budgeted to distribute £175,680 to elderly organisations in the area in the current year. Based upon previous experience, the Council is considering a change of practice to be more consistent council-wide and more safe and secure for elderly residents.
- 7.2** There are a number of advantages and disadvantages to each identified option.

8. Recommendation

- 8.1 Committee is asked to consider and discuss options available for fair and secure distribution to elderly organisations which would be easily managed by the Council, with a view to providing feedback to the Corporate and Efficient Governance Committee**

Joyce White
Executive Director of Corporate Services
Date: January 2009

Wards Affected:	All Wards
Appendix:	Appendix I - List of Local Authorities responding Appendix II - Advantages and Disadvantages of alternative methods of distribution
Background Papers:	Committee Report October 2008 'Christmas Payments to Elderly People's Organisations' Responses from questionnaire to other local authorities
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