Wiltshire Council

Area Board Briefing Note

Service:	**Cost of Living**
Date prepared:	**10 September 2024**
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Cost of Living

As we prepare for winter, there remain some financial pressures on household budgets, and it is anticipated that there will be continuing demand for support and advice.

Overall inflation is relatively stable at 2.2%[1], which suggests that some cost pressures for the community have reduced. However, for example, under the new energy price cap, gas and electricity prices will rise by 10% in England, Scotland and Wales from October[2].

The Council, therefore, is continuing to work with partners to deliver interventions that provide advice and support to our communities, including:

- Wiltshire libraries are continuing as warm spaces and as sources of advice.

- We will contact community providers to update our interactive guide to help people find key support to combat fuel and food poverty. In addition, we are creating a page on the directory that gives an interactive advent calendar view of provision/ opportunities over the Christmas period.

- Wiltshire bus users can continue to travel on most routes in the county for just £2 or less for a single fare until the end of December 2024[3]. The fare price reduction has been funded by the Government and is aimed at getting more people to use buses across the country during the current cost of living challenges.

- Ahead of the Government announcement to extend the Household Support Fund by 6 months from the 1st of October[4], we are analysing the impact of schemes delivered under the programme so can further develop our approach to ensure that

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[1] CPI ANNUAL RATE 00: ALL ITEMS 2015=100 - Office for National Statistics (ons.gov.uk)

[2] What is the energy price cap and who gets winter fuel payments? - BBC News

[3] Get around for £2 - extended to December 2024 - Connecting Wiltshire

[4] Government support extended to help struggling households with bills and essential costs over winter - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

those households most in need are targeted for support. A full report is expected at Cabinet in October.

- Pending confirmation of funding, Foodbanks and Community Food Providers will be invited to apply for funding to support their work.

- Our website and media channels offer a range of online support and sign-posting information on topics including council tax/benefits, energy advice and mental health support.

- A dedicated Wiltshire Wellbeing support line to provide advice and guidance, and officers are working with to improve processes to ensure people are directed to right support. Contact details on the phone are: 0300 003 4576, and email is: **wellbeinghub@wiltshire.gov.uk**

- With change to the eligibility of Winter Fuel Payments[5], the DWP has been encouraging the take up of Pension Credit[6]. The Council has also been promoting the take-up of Pension Credit to those who may be missing out.

FUEL Programme

The Council is pleased to say that, following a successful summer programme that saw more than 1,500 young people make around 2,000 bookings at over 41 locations. , Wiltshire Council's Holiday Activity and Food programme (FUEL) will be back during the Christmas school holidays. It is funded by the Department for Education and provides children who are eligible for benefits-related free school meals with free access to activity, food and nutritional education during school holidays. Eligible families will be able to sign up later in the year and details will be promoted through all schools in Wiltshire in due course. More information about FUEL can be found at www.wiltshire.gov.uk/fuel-programme.

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[5] Winter Fuel Payment: Eligibility - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

[6] "You could get Pension Credit" – Week of Action to drive take up - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)