

Leader's Announcement Cost of Living Update Cabinet – 12 September 2023

Introduction

Cost of Living issues remain a concern for the Council, our partners and the communities we serve. I am proud of the way we have worked, flexibly, bringing together different services and schemes to provide support. We don't know yet the exact nature of the ongoing challenges, nor the support that central government will provide, but I am confident that we will be able to respond quickly, as we have done before, to this changing environment.

Following on from the [update](#) I gave Cabinet before the summer, and before talking about the future, I wanted to highlight some of the work that has been undertaken over the last year, and crucially the impact that this has had on individuals:

- Warm & Safe Wiltshire

The Boiler fund project supported a family to replace an oil fuelled heating system that had broken where the family was in receipt of Universal Credit and Disability benefits. The replacement was crucial as the child was homeschooled, and the cold was impacting on the families mental and physical health. After the work was completed, the parent told officers:

“You have given us the best quality of life – I cannot thank you enough. The whole house is lovely and warm, we can completely relax and enjoy it. I didn't realise the impact it was having on my mental health, worry about my son”.

- Libraries

Colleagues in the Data & Insight team analysed feedback collected by Libraries staff to identify the key themes, including that:

Libraries has created a Warm and inviting atmosphere creating a positive customer experience, which could make it easier to access to information.

Gratitude for warm spaces and warm packs provision for the public.

- Boater and Traveller Winter Support Project

Public Health secured funding from the UK Shared prosperity fund and in partnership with Julian House identified boaters and travellers who needed urgent winter support at a time when there was no government funding to support this group. The fund allowed people to receive a mixture of fuel and food vouchers. The following testimony, given to officers, shows the impact it had on one family:

A single parent with a 17-month-old baby girl, they previously worked as a carer and were determined to return to work. They were able to find employment, however after paying for childcare and travel cost, they were only earning the equivalent of £3 per hour. The winter allowance helped them maintain this work over winter whilst providing a warm environment for them and their baby and enabled her to gain promotion.

Household Support Fund 2023-24

As reported previously to [Cabinet in March](#), the Council has been allocated £5,457,313 from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). This next tranche of the Fund has been provided to support households, who would otherwise struggle to buy food, pay essential

utility bills or meet other essential living costs to help them with significantly rising living costs for the financial year 2023-24.

The Council has learnt a significant amount about how to best utilise this funding, and services across the council will be delivering those most in need to combat food and energy poverty. I am very pleased to say, the charities and the voluntary sector in the county have been successful in bidding for funds from the scheme, to enable them to deliver support to the homeless, older people and those facing domestic violence amongst others. This is a real example of partnership working at its best, and you can read more about [what schemes the HSF supports](#) on our webs.

Libraries and Warm Spaces

I am pleased to confirm that all of our libraries will continue to provide a warm welcome over the Autumn and Winter and will be places where Warm Packs will be distributed from October onwards.

FUEL

You will no doubt have heard of the challenges are established FUEL programme faced when a provider pulled out shortly before the summer holidays. I commend the hard work of the officers involved to find alternative providers to ensure that children received healthy food and activities across the summer holidays.

EBSS Scheme

Officers have made the final payments under this government scheme. Stand ready to support the government should another scheme be available, and we hope to make this clear to our local MPs should the opportunity arise.

Gypsy, Roma, Traveller & Boater Communities

Many in this community are not eligible for government schemes, with a most not meeting residency requirements event with recent expansions. I am, then, pleased to see that Public Health, working with outreach charity partners, will be providing fuel/food vouchers and energy saving advice from November.

For the future

I am pleased that officers who have been coordinating work, will continue to meet regularly to horizon scan and respond to future issues.

As well as the plans highlighted already, officers will be updating the community directory to ensure that local people can find warm spaces and food providers in their community. This should be updated in the next few weeks.

As part of the 1st tranche of the HSF programme, just over £100,000 has been invested in 19 different food settings with the 2nd tranche opening around Christmas time with, approximately, another £100,000 remaining.

I was pleased to report to Cabinet previously that Area Boards had chosen to support schemes in their areas that addressed the Cost of Living issues in their area, and I hope that they will continue to do so.

I will, of course, keep the Cabinet updated.