

Wiltshire Council

Full Council

18 October 2022

Responding to the Cost of Living Challenge

Executive Summary

To update Council on the current and planned actions taken to support of the residents, business, and staff in the Wiltshire community

Proposal

To note the update

Reason for Proposal

To highlight the work of the Council in response to the national and local challenges.

Terence Herbert
Chief Executive Officer

Responding to the Cost of Living Challenge

Purpose of Report

1. To update Council on the current and planned actions taken to support of the residents, business, and staff in the Wiltshire community.

Relevance to the Council's Business Plan

2. The Council's activities support the Council's business plan outcomes to support a Thriving Economy, a Resilient Society through working with partners and our community to Empower People. Efforts to improve energy efficiency also support the work to place Wiltshire on the path to carbon neutral.

Background

3. A detailed update was given to the most recent meeting of the Cabinet held on the 27th of September 2022. The relevant papers are linked here for ease of reference:
 - [Verbal update from the Leader to Cabinet](#)
 - [Cabinet Minute 77 refers](#)
4. A notice of motion has also been submitted relating to Cost of Living – No. 2022-02 refers.

Main Considerations

5. Officers are heading up three main areas of work, overseen by the Corporate Leadership Team (CLT), which aim to:
 - Support our Residents – led by Emma Legg (Director – Ageing & Living Well)
 - Support for Doing Business (including Schools and other Educational Establishments) – led by Victoria Moloney (Head of Economy and Regeneration)
 - Support for our Staff - led by Tamsin Kielb (Assistant Director, HR & OD)
6. These areas of work are already a core function of the Council, and valuable lessons have been learnt from our Covid response to work including:
 - How best to structure internal decision making to support officers to respond in an agile way to the emerging needs from the communities they serve.
 - How to use our external networks, which had been strengthened during the pandemic, to best combine our efforts.
 - How we proactively use communication tools to empower our communities.

7. This means that the Council is well placed to respond effectively to the challenges faced by the communities of Wiltshire.
8. Officers are meeting regularly to ensure that actions are coordinated across the Council and with our partners across the community.
9. Officers have worked quickly to review the information on the Council's website and have updated the [cost of living](#), featuring it on the landing page of the website, ensure that residents can direct themselves to the best sources of information and support, including:
 - [Council tax, benefits and financial support](#)
 - [Energy costs advice and guidance](#)
 - [Housing information and support](#)
 - [Mental Health support](#)
 - [Local practical help](#)

Support for Residents

10. Officers are working together to ensure our services can respond effectively to emerging need, and to support our community to respond to the challenge. The work broadly covers our universal offer, ensuring that anybody can access information and support through the council and their communities; and our targeted work, ensuring that funding and assistance is coordinated for the most vulnerable in our society.
11. Some of the key themes/activities include:
 - a. Council supporting Voluntary organisations to bring together leaders across the faith, community, and voluntary sector leaders to launch a fundraising campaign encouraging people to donate (including unused rebates).
 - b. Working to map provision of voluntary-led support, including Warm Spaces and Foodbanks to share this information widely, but also use it to target provision where there are gaps.
 - c. Ensuring the existing Wellbeing Hub support line can assist residents and that information resources used are shared widely to ensure that anyone who has contact with a resident is able to direct them to support.
 - d. Looking at how barriers to accessing to support can be removed e.g. following on initiatives such as lifting restrictions on bus passes to ensure the most vulnerable can access services more easily.
12. As highlighted by the Leader at Cabinet, Area Boards have an opportunity to contribute to this work by helping to gather intelligence on what activity is taking place in their area, support through grant funding relevant projects and to promote the activities of the council and partners to ensure people can access assistance.
13. Area Boards have a track record of combining data through the [Joint Strategic Needs Assessment](#) along with their deep understanding their unique communities through

local. Council Directors are attending each Area Board meeting which will increase opportunities to share information.

14. Wiltshire's libraries already offer safe spaces for people for people during the day, with a range of community groups and activities hosted in their spaces. Staff have an excellent track record of signposting people to information, and actively supporting them to access computers for online help. Libraries will continue to work with council and community partners to host services that will create supportive and welcoming space for residents e.g. hosting drop-in sessions on financial well-being.
15. The Council, along with Swindon Borough Council, Dorset & Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service in partnership with the Centre for Sustainable Energy, continues to support and promote the work of the [Warm & Safe Wiltshire](#) partnership help residents live in safer and healthier homes.
16. The Council will also continue to administer national schemes, such as Energy Rebates and the Household Support Fund, that target funding to the more vulnerable:
 - a. The energy rebate to homes in council tax bands A-D (153k households all paid out or allocated as credit to council tax bills) as well as 1k discretionary payments to households in other bands.
 - b. The Household Support Fund which has already allocated £2.7m to pensioners, vulnerable working age adults, those in temporary accommodation and to food banks and associated projects for those in need. The scheme has been targeted at those least able to cope, with 23,000 awards made. Phase 3, running from 1st October to 31st March 2023, has been approved with further support targeted to families with children eligible for free school meals, including the equivalent for those in early-years, low-income households including those with disability & long-term health conditions, elderly residents; and to support activities within: Adult & Children's Social Care, Warm Spaces, homeless and those at risk of homelessness, Food Banks and Local Welfare Provision.
 - c. The Council Tax Reduction Scheme is also available with, and an additional £140k for discretionary payments allocated.

Support for Doing Business

17. Officers continue to build on the successful network and partnerships with businesses to ensure that intelligence on impacts to the local economy is gathered and shared appropriately, and that businesses are signposted to the support they require. Intelligence will look particularly on the 6-month support timescale, and what sectors may face particular challenges beyond that period.
18. Officers will deliver the UK Shared Prosperity Fund in line with the Council's agreed priorities, including support for Warm and Safe, support for energy efficiency for businesses and support for personal mobility.

19. Active engagement is already underway with schools to ensure that they are supported to manage budgetary pressures and are sharing best practice including on energy efficiency.

Support for Staff

20. As well as ensuring staff have access to wellbeing and support resources, the Council will review policies and processes as appropriate, and will consider how staff can be flexibly deployed to meet emerging need.

Overview and Scrutiny Engagement

21. Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee have yet to ask for a specific update on these issues but will be able to review their workplans as they require.

Safeguarding Implications

22. There are no decisions arising from this update report. However, it is worth noting that as with the pandemic, safeguarding teams are aware that external pressures can increase the risk of harm to vulnerable children and adults. Teams are working to ensure that their programmes of work reflect the possible increase in demand.

Public Health Implications

23. Programmes that support healthy living are being reviewed to ensure that meet changing needs e.g. more people wanting to quit smoking, and cost of food changing.
24. Also, Public Health officers are also providing invaluable intelligence to the council to help target services better.

Procurement Implications

25. **Support** for Business will also look at the impacts of the Cost of Living on Council's procurement and commissioning relationships.

Equalities Impact of the Proposal

26. There are no equalities implications arising from this report.

Environmental and Climate Change Considerations

27. There are no direct implication arising from the report, but support for residents and businesses promoting energy efficiency will support net zero goals.

Workforce Implications

28. There are no workforces implications arising from this report

Financial Implications

29. There are no financial implications arising from this report.

Legal Implications

30. There are no legal implications arising from this report.

Conclusions

31. Council is asked to note the update.

Terence Herbert, Chief Executive

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Appendices

None

Background Papers

None