

Area Board Briefing Note – Cost of Living Update – November 2022

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As detailed in the update to Full Council in October, Wiltshire Council is focusing on three principal areas to meet the Cost of Living crisis, namely support for Businesses, Our Staff and the People in our communities.

The Council has provided extensive coordination of resources on a [dedicated Cost of Living page](#). This includes links to information for sources of national and local support.

Officers have worked to pull together to create an interactive directory that allows people to find out what warm spaces and community food providers are in their immediate local area. The directory also includes what other facilities and services are provided at each location.

The directory has been created using information collected by the Council to establish what support is already up and running in the county and will be regularly updated.

Wiltshire Council's friendly library staff will be playing their part too, by working with Warm and Safe Wiltshire and The Rural Communities Energy Support Network, to assist residents seeking basic energy advice and make referrals to experienced energy advisors in all but its smallest libraries. All libraries will be able to signpost people to community partners and agencies that can support people through the rising cost of living. Libraries will also be collection points for Warm Packs, which includes a hot water bottle and blanket, for anyone who would benefit from some free essentials. These will be available for collection soon.

As well as existing customer contact channels, the Council is planning how to use the Wellbeing Hub line to help people find the right support.

Support for Businesses and Schools

The Enterprise Network (set up by the Council) is hosting a series of webinars designed to provide start up and small businesses help, support and advice to guide businesses through the current economic challenges. To find out more about the Take TEN series and to join the webinars or watch videos, people can go to: www.theenterprisenetwork.co.uk/support/cost-of-doing-business.

As part of the carbon reduction work, School Leaders are being encouraged to sign up to the Energy Sparks programme which can help them get on top of their energy bills and find ways to reduce costs. We are also supporting Council maintained schools with a grant to access their half hourly smart meter data for a year to give them the data they need to make informed choices.

Support for Staff

As well as ensuring staff have access to wellbeing and support resources, including a new Mental Health Advocate scheme, the Council will review policies and processes as appropriate, and will consider how staff can be flexibly deployed to meet emerging need.

Targeted Support in the Community

The Council has been administering the Government's national Household Support Grant Scheme designed to support those most in need across England, to help with the significantly rising living costs in the period up to the end of March 2023. The money can be used to support households in the most need who would otherwise struggle with energy bills, food and water bills, particularly those who may not be eligible for the other support that the Government has recently made available but who are nevertheless in need.

The council has been awarded £2,728,656 in total and has worked with partner agencies to allocate the money and ensure it gets to those who need it most. Payments began in October and are continuing to be made. People do not need to apply to Wiltshire Council as those eligible will be identified and contacted.

The Council is working with partners in the VCSE sectors to promote their campaign to encourage donations, particularly from those who have surplus fuel rebates, to help fund schemes to support those most in need.

Wiltshire Council has also provided funding to Wiltshire Community Foundation and partners to deliver support under the Surviving Winter campaign which provides practical and financial help for people living in fuel poverty. From 1 November, people who are in receipt of means-tested benefit and are aged over 65 or suffer from a long-term health condition, may be eligible for assistance including fuel vouchers and a range of advice. For more information about eligibility and the help available contact Warm and Safe Wiltshire on 0800 038 5722 email warmandsafe@cse.org.uk.

Funding is also being provided to Age UK Wiltshire for provision and delivery of hot meals to isolated elderly residents who are unable to meet the cost of this service themselves; for further information contact Age UK Community Meals on 01793 279606.

Support during the holidays

Wiltshire Council will be delivering its successful Holiday Activity and Food (FUEL) programme again this winter. The programme provides children eligible for benefits related free school meals, refugees, those currently in the care system and those referred by a professional service with access to free high quality activities, nutritious meals and food education during the school holidays.

The FUEL programme is delivered with funding from the Department for Education and

will run from Monday 19 December – Thursday 22 December. Eligible families will be able to sign up by following the application link listed on [FUEL programme - Wiltshire Council](#). The application window is open now until December 11, please sign up early to avoid disappointment.

The camps provide the opportunity for all participants to take part in a range of enriching activities including structured sports, arts and crafts, STEM activities, laser tag, circus skills, robotics and much more. Participants also will take part in nutritional workshops and be provided with a hot lunch each day.

Two FUEL Christmas camps specifically for young people with special educational needs and/or a disability will also place at Springfield Community Campus in Corsham and at Five Rivers Health and Wellbeing Centre in Salisbury and individuals will be able to take part in activities such as dodgeball, dance, new age kurling, cricket and boccia. Further information and sign up details are also available on the FUEL webpage. There is more info here in via youtube: [HAF summer case study 2022 - YouTube](#).

For further information about the Holiday Activity and Food Programme in Wiltshire please email fuelprogramme@wiltshire.gov.uk

Promoting Fundraising Campaigns

As part of our on going work with our Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise partners, Wiltshire Council is helping to promote the Wiltshire Community Foundation's [Cost of Living Appeal](#) through our networks.

Building on the work of previous appeals where people who can afford to are encouraged to donate any surplus winter fuel allowances, the wider community is being ask to help generate vital funds to help grassroots voluntary groups and charities in Swindon and Wiltshire who are supporting families and individuals in the face of escalating rent, food and energy prices.

The money raised through this joint appeal will fund a new grants programme to support projects which are keeping people fed and warm and provide additional practical support and advice to help people cope throughout this period of great hardship.

You can donate to the appeal [here](#) or call the donation line on 01380 738989 from 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday.