

Leader's Announcement

Cabinet

14 November 2023

Cost of Living

With overall inflation stabilising, it is welcome news that some cost pressures for the community have reduced, but with other financial pressures remaining on household budgets, we anticipate that there will be continuing demand for support and advice as the winter draws in.

So, I am happy to announce that the Council 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 will also play a key role in distributing support (e.g. with Warm Packs or free Sim-cards) and advice (e.g. Providing energy advice or signposting to partners).
- Warm & Safe Wiltshire in place to help people live in warmer, safer and healthier homes including advice, outreach support or insulation works.
- We have contacted community providers to update our interactive guide to help people find key support to combat fuel and food poverty.
- We have further developed our approach to delivering Household Support Fund, working with a range of services and partners to financially support a range of programmes and initiatives.
- Our website and media channels offer a range of online support and signposting information on topics including council tax/benefits, energy advice and mental health support.
- Our Area boards continuing to look at ways to support their local community projects.
- 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.
- We continue to engagement with our communities, through activity such as the Boaters Survey, which has had a terrific response so far, and Community Conversations, to understand need.
- The DWP will be issuing the second Cost of Living Payment of £300 to those in receipt of Universal Credit, Jobseekers allowance, Employment support

allowance, Income support and Pension Credit between 31st October and 19th November 2023.¹

- I am very pleased to say that, following a successful summer programme that saw more than 1,220 young people take part, 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.

Council Tax Reduction Scheme Consultation

Additionally, I would like to highlight the consultation on the Council Tax Reduction Scheme. We are consulting on possible changes to its local Council Tax Reduction Scheme for working aged people, ensuring it continues to benefit those who need it, and that the scheme evolves in line with Government's developing plans on Universal Credit.

The consultation is now open until 27 November 2023. I'd like to encourage people to respond via the electronic survey online at <https://www.wiltshire.gov.uk/benefits-council-tax-reduction> - paper copies are available in all of Wiltshire's libraries and main hubs. So far, more than two hundred responses have been received.

Potential changes to the scheme should result in it being more generous to people in hardship who are eligible to receive support, and that in turn should help to reduce the overall council tax debt written off each year due to those who are unable to pay.

¹ [Cost of Living Payments 2023 to 2024 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/cost-of-living-payments-2023-to-2024)