

## **Briefing for Cabinet – 29 November 2022**

### **Cost of Living Update**

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

As stated in previous updates, this is a rapidly moving situation. For example, the government announced yesterday that under the expanded ECO+ scheme, people whose homes have an energy efficiency rating of D or below, and who have not yet been supported by an existing scheme, will be able to get help whether they are in private, rented or social housing.

The government has [published proposals](#) for consultation with a view to having the appropriate legislation in place after Christmas to allow the scheme to start in the Spring 2023.

### **Information and Support**

To help staff, the public and partners to keep up to date with the latest support, the Council has created an extensive list of resources on our [dedicated Cost of Living page](#). This includes links to information for sources of national and local support.

Additionally, officers have proactively worked with colleagues and community groups, to create an [interactive community directory](#) that allows people find out what warm spaces and community food providers are in their immediate local area.

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.

The directory also includes information on what additional facilities and services are provided at each location with the aim of ensuring people feel welcome and enable more people to overcome barriers to them accessing information and support.

Wiltshire Council libraries will themselves officially become warm spaces for people this winter, providing a warm and friendly welcome to support anyone who needs help. In addition, our dedicated friendly library staff will be 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. This is an extension of the crucial role that our librarians already play in helping people access information and services.

As well as existing customer contact channels, the Council is planning how to use the existing Wellbeing Hub line to help people find the right support and will be further promoting this soon.

## **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 with the right help, support and advice to guide them through the current economic challenges. You can find out more about the Take TEN series and to join the webinars or watch the recordings at their website: [www.theenterprisenetwork.co.uk/support/cost-of-doing-business](http://www.theenterprisenetwork.co.uk/support/cost-of-doing-business)

The Council is working with the Federation of Small Businesses, the Swindon and Wiltshire Local Enterprise Partnership, Business West, local Chambers of Commerce and other business representative groups, to ensure available advice and support is well communicated and aligned. In addition, the Council is continually monitoring the impact of current cost pressures to identify particular sectors or businesses at risk.

The Council has been notified of a further support scheme for residents and businesses that use alternative fuels, such as heating oil. Non-domestic (business) premises will be included, and work is underway to identify where this support may be required.

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. This is on top of existing financial and energy efficiency advice we providing to our educational partners

## **Support for Staff**

As well as ensuring staff have access to wellbeing and support resources, including 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 (HSF) 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, 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 was 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 was also award £877,050 for a discretionary energy rebate scheme that ran until November. The number of applications to the scheme was lower than

anticipated, just under 1200 awards were made originally, so officers proactively identified a further 9500+ low-income pensioners who had received the original energy rebate scheme but had not received any additional support e.g. from the HSF. 6500 of these pensioners will be paid £70 direct, as we have their bank account details, and the remaining will receive a credit in their council tax accounts.

The Council has been notified of a further support scheme for residents and businesses that use alternative fuels. We await further details on how this will be implemented.

Wiltshire Council has also provided funding to support Wiltshire Community Foundation and partners to deliver 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](mailto: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 our website: [FUEL programme - Wiltshire Council](#)

The application window is open now until December 11, so 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 on the council's YouTube page: [HAF summer case study 2022 - YouTube](#)

For further information about the Holiday Activity and Food Programme in Wiltshire please email [fuelprogramme@wiltshire.gov.uk](mailto:fuelprogramme@wiltshire.gov.uk)

### **Working with Partners**

As part of our continuing 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 asked 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.

This opportunity came out of dialogue with leaders in the sector, and we will continue to meet with our partners, including through the Wiltshire Public Service Board and the Military Civil Integration Board, to share information with the aim of coordinating our efforts.