

## Cabinet Update – Cost of Living – June 2022

I would like to say a few words on the work we are undertaking as a council to combat the recent increases in the cost of living as there is a range of support we offer or administer already in place that we are promoting, alongside support and initiatives being undertaken nationally.

These include:

- Providing the Local Welfare Provision, funded by Wiltshire Council, with £100,000 set aside for 2022/23. This is a scheme for those in crisis and the number of claims and recipients of this scheme are typically 1,000 per annum.
- The Council Tax Reduction Scheme, which currently supports 26,000 households (10k of which are pensioners). We have allocated a further £140,000 to a Discretionary Council Tax Reduction Scheme, for those struggling most with the payment of council tax.
- Administering housing benefit, currently delivered to 12,000 households, as well as the Discretionary Housing Payment Scheme where we have already committed almost 50% of the £330,000 available.
- Delivering the first part of the Household Support Fund, and we were allocated £2.7m for the first six months of this year and there is no need for people to apply to Wiltshire Council, as eligible people are identified and contacted.

This is being deployed to support:

- Pensioners in receipt of council tax reduction and pension credit with £133.
- Vulnerable working age households with £66.
- Food payments during school holidays for those on free school meals or with early years pupil premium, or other vulnerable families (working with schools).
- Vouchers for food and utility bills for those in temporary accommodation, supported accommodation or those recently moved into permanent accommodation.
- Food banks and linked projects to ensure they can purchase and provide food to those most in need.

We are also planning use of the fund for September to March, for which we have been allocated a similar amount as the first half of this year.

- Offering the Holiday Activities and Food programme (known as [FUEL](#) in Wiltshire), which will run again in Wiltshire over summer 2022. FUEL is a free holiday activity and food project that offers those on free school meals the opportunity to take part in a range of fun activities and receive a nutritious meal during school holiday periods.

- Paying the energy rebate, to those living in houses in council tax Bands A-D. This has already been received by over 100,000 households. We have been chasing bank details for over 40,000 households in order to issue them with payment. The final tranche of letters inviting them to claim were delivered on 25 May.
- A webpage has been set up outlining the full range of [What can we help you with?](#) and signposting to other organisations as appropriate. There is also a [national version](#).

The announcement from the Chancellor last month was also further welcome news and this support in response to the short-term crisis is vital.

It also means residents in Wiltshire will be receiving more than £220m through the various schemes in place.

As well as this direct support on the cost of living, we are supporting a range of initiatives that address rising fuel prices through energy efficiency.

These include:

- Warm and Safe Wiltshire, which provides a free and impartial energy advice service and aims to reduce fuel poverty in Wiltshire.
- A Home Upgrade Grant scheme which will open this summer delivering over £3m of support on insulation and renewable energy.
- Through the Green Homes Grant we are delivering a £4.4m scheme that offers households an income of £30,000 or less, and living in a property that is rated D, E, F or G for energy efficiency, the chance to access up to £10,000 for improvements such as insulation, solar panels and double glazing.
- We continue to invest in our council housing stock through the retrofit programme, helping some of our most vulnerable residents save money on their energy bills. The aim is to retrofit 500 homes a year and complete all 5000 of our council homes by 2030.
- In May, we launched Solar Together, a joint buying scheme that allows communities to purchase solar production and storage at the right price.
- We continue to promote other energy efficiency measures by social media, such as the £5k grants for heat pumps which began last month.

I have held discussions with my Cabinet and our partners in other public service and voluntary sector organisations on what more we can do individually and collectively – including promotion of existing support, widening the scope of existing schemes, better targeting of

vulnerable clients with support, tackling the risk of exploitation, reinvigorating initiatives such as car sharing and will continue to keep this area under review.