

## **Briefing for Cabinet – 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2023**

With inflation and energy costs still high, we are continuing to provide support to people through the cost-of-living crisis.

Throughout this crisis we have been involved in several projects and initiatives to ensure people can get the support they need, and we have no intention of slowing down. We'll continue to apply for any funding and work with our wide range of partners to help our communities as much as we can.

As we've come to expect, the communities themselves have been supporting one another during this really challenging time and that shows the strength and the very best of our county.

### **Energy Support**

The Government recently extended its energy price guarantee for an additional three months until the end of June 2023, which limits the amount suppliers can charge per unit of energy used. However, the £66/£67 monthly payments that most residents were receiving from their energy supplier since October 2022, as part of the Energy Bills Support Scheme (EBSS), recently came to an end. With this in mind, and in addition to the continuing high inflation, Wiltshire Council continues to provide a range of support to those most in need.

The council is continuing to allocate funding to those who were not eligible for payments through the EBSS. So far, the council has allocated £510,000 through the Government's EBSS Alternative Fund and a further £172,600 through its Alternative Fuel Payment Scheme for people who don't have a domestic electricity supplier. More information can be found on our [website](#).

### **Household Support Fund**

As reported at the [Cabinet meeting in March](#), the council has allocated all of its funding from the 2022/23 phase of the Government's Household Support Fund, but recently had confirmation that it had received more than £5.4m to allocate during 2023/24. The Household Support Fund is provided by the Department for Work and Pension (DWP) and is in place to support households that would otherwise struggle to buy food or pay essential utility bills or meet other essential living costs to help them during the current cost-of-living challenges.

Officers have been engaging with different services from both within Wiltshire Council and with our voluntary and community sector partners to encourage the submission of proposals that meet the criteria of the government's scheme. Submissions are currently being reviewed by the Advisory Board prior to the plan being submitted to DWP.

### **Support in Libraries**

Although the temperatures have risen, our libraries continue to be there for people who need them, providing anyone with a warm and friendly welcome. The council continues to work 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. In total, 1,462 warm packs were handed out at libraries, which contained a thermal mug, a fleece blanket, and a hot water bottle with a cover. More packs may be available later this year. The excellent work of the Warm & Safe Wiltshire Partnership has recently be highlighted in a [LGA case study](#).

All libraries can signpost people to community partners and agencies that can support people through the rising cost of living. Wiltshire Libraries are also working with the Good Things Foundation to distribute free SIMs and mobile data to people in need. The National Databank scheme is supported by UK mobile networks including Vodafone, O2 and Three. More information can be found at <https://www.wiltshire.gov.uk/libraries-news>

### **Interactive Directories**

Last year Wiltshire Council set up an [interactive directory](#), which continues to be available, so people could easily find local food providers and warm spaces near to them at just a few clicks of a mouse. The council will soon be engaging with all the local groups that registered to be included on the directory to establish what support is still available in the county and what the plans might be for the future so that it has a clear picture of what might be needed.

### **Work of Area Boards**

All 18 of Wiltshire Council's Area Boards have also been working on several projects and initiatives to support people in the county's community areas. Multiple Area Boards have hosted warm and safe community events, bringing together a range of partners to showcase what support they can offer to residents. They have coordinated the production, printing, and distribution of local cost of living information leaflets to specifically targeted residential areas through officers, volunteers, and councillors. Some have worked with community groups to draw in multiple sources of funding to develop small emergency hardship funds that agencies can refer suitable residents to. In partnership with food banks and community organisations, the area boards have also provided a range of useful products free of charge to suitable residents including slow cookers and electric blankets.

A summary of the activities in each Community Area is included as an appendix.

### **Bus Passes**

The council also recently confirmed that all holders of Wiltshire concessionary bus passes can continue using their pass to travel at any time on local bus services during April. Normally, concessionary bus passes for older and disabled people cannot be used to travel before 9.30am on weekdays, but Wiltshire Council agreed with bus operators to temporarily lift this restriction from 1 September 2022. The offer is eligible on all local buses that operate within the Wiltshire Council area, or for any bus journeys that begin in Wiltshire. Concessionary passes cannot be used to board a bus within the Borough of Swindon before 9.30am on weekdays.

### **Holiday Activities**

The council has been delivering the Holiday Activity and Food programme, known locally as FUEL during the Easter holidays and this will continue in the Summer and Christmas

school holidays in 2023. The FUEL programme is funded by the Department of Education and will deliver camps in ten areas across the county where there is the greatest level of need. At FUEL camps children receive a nutritious lunch each day and are given the opportunity to take part in a range of practical, physical and hands on activities including robotics workshops, circus skills, sporting sessions, Olympic kit, talent shows, and arts and crafts.

### **General Information**

Our website remains a good source of information for residents, and our wellbeing line remains open for calls, but in addition to this, there is 'Worrying about money' leaflet now available to download via the IFAN website [Worrying about Money](#) and this is being distributed widely amongst partners as a leaflet.

Additional information on the support provided by Wiltshire Council's Area Boards:

Area Board	Cost-of-living project
Bradford on Avon	Area board item specifically on the cost-of-living. Update locally on the large number of warm spaces available across the town in partnership with the Town Council. Information leaflet produced locally to highlight support services for those in need.
Calne	The area board in partnership with Calne Town Council and the Health and Social Care Forum hosted Calne Warm and Well. This was a community event that brought together partner organisations such as Wiltshire Citizen's Advice, Warm and Safe Wiltshire, Calne Foodbank and Calne Warm spaces to share cost-of-living advice and information with residents to help maximise their income.
Chippenham	The area board supported discussions in the community on warm spaces and cost of living and has allocated funding to community projects to enable residents to access warm and welcoming spaces over the winter months. These have included Chippenham Community Hub's new Warm Room, a community lunch project at St Peter's Church and a new support worker for the homeless charity Doorway.
Corsham	Corsham Area Board, in partnership with local councils co-ordinated discussions to enable a network of warm spaces to be created. Area Board funding helped the Box Methodist Church Thursday café to extend their weekly offer to provide a warm and safe space for residents where they could enjoy a free hot drink and access support if needed. Corsham Town Council also collaborated with Wiltshire Council's Family and Community Learning team and Warm and Safe Wiltshire to provide energy saving, budgeting, and cooking courses at Springfield Community Campus.
Devizes	<p>Following a dedicated area board event to discuss the cost-of-living situation, four actions were agreed. These were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• to provide funding for warm spaces,</li> <li>• to work with Wiltshire Council and the foodbank to explore a 'cash first' approach.</li> <li>• to provide financial support for an energy event that took place on the 28 Jan.</li> <li>• to promote a 'look after your neighbour' culture.</li> </ul>
Marlborough	In partnership with Marlborough Town Council, the area board has helped to fund a new part-time post of Cost-of-Living Co-ordinator. This person is the central hub for all the work going on to support local residents. This includes producing a monthly leaflet with details of local Warm Spaces and other support available to

Area Board	Cost-of-living project
	residents and for helping to put on a Warm and Well event for the public, alongside the council's Area Board Delivery Officer.
Malmesbury	In partnership with Malmesbury Town Council, the area board has helped to support several local venues into becoming new Warm Spaces. Through regular meetings and co-ordination, a calendar of events throughout the week has been produced and was distributed door-to-door within the local area. Through Malmesbury & Villages Community Area Partnership, area board funding was made available to these warm spaces to reach out and offer a warm welcome, hot drinks and activities to the people who need support.
Melksham	Building upon the success of providing slow cookers, the area board partnered with the Melksham Free Dining Group to provide electric blankets to elderly and vulnerable people.
Pewsey	The area board worked with Pewsey Community Area Partnership to draw in match funding externally and establish a small emergency hardship fund that agencies can refer people to.
RWB&C	During the autumn, several new community food providers began work in the community area to complement those already in operation. The area board reached out to all of those groups and offered support and funding to help them grow and offer a better service to residents. The area board meeting in January showcased these new groups and how they fit into an area-wide network of community food provision.
Salisbury	Working in partnership with a wide range of community groups, faith leaders and the city council, over 20 warm spaces have been set up covering most divisions. Drawn on the resources of the pre-existing Salisbury Foodie Partnership to ensure community food provision is maintained, from six foodbanks and pantries. Helped fund and hand deliver to targeted estates, community settings and a range of accessible places - 14,000 cost-of-living and warm spaces information flyers.
Southern Wiltshire	Supported a range of community groups, faith leaders and Abri Housing Association to set up seven warm spaces and a new community pantry. This has been delivered as part of ongoing dialogue facilitated by the area board and with local grant funding.
South-West Wiltshire	Supported and funded a range of community groups to set up six warm spaces and two new pop-up foodbanks.
Stonehenge	Held public meeting to gauge need/interest in warm spaces. Pledged to award funding from Older and Vulnerable Adults Funding for warm spaces or other cost-of-living projects. Cost-of-living support flyer is in development
Tidworth	Held public meeting to gauge the need and interest in warm spaces. Tidworth Warm Spaces sub-group formed with aim of having a warm space available within the community area every day of the

Area Board	Cost-of-living project
	<p>week. This was successfully achieved by mid-January. The area board ringfenced £2,000 of Older and Vulnerable Adults funding for cost-of-living projects. A cost-of-living flyer was produced and circulated. Advertising of warm spaces took place in parish magazine.</p>
Trowbridge	<p>Trowbridge Area Board had specific themed items of their meeting dedicated to the cost-of-living. Guest speakers from the community fridges, foodbank, Lions club and Ruksak charity spoke on their work locally and networked together. The Collaborative Schools network were represented and have shared information through the local schools to parents and families most in need. Trowbridge Area Board are keen to establish a regular working group or networking forum for all those who attended and shared information.</p>
Warminster	<p>The cost-of-living was a featured agenda item for Warminster Area Board. Presentations and updates on local work were delivered by various charities and support services including the foodbank and Warminster Action Group. Details of funding and support were widely shared with local partners</p>
Westbury	<p>Held public meeting to gauge need/interest in Warm Spaces. Health and Wellbeing Group increased frequency of meetings to one per month. Warm spaces began springing up on most days of the week around the Community Area including villages. The area board ringfenced £2,000 of Older and Vulnerable Adults funding for cost-of-living projects. Funding accessed by Westbury Area Network who purchase warm packages to support those that were available at the library. Westbury Community Project awarded funding to start delivering weekly community cinema to act as a warm space. Cost-of-living support flyer was produced and circulated.</p>