

Area Board Briefing Note – Cost of Living Crisis

| | |
|------------------------------|--|
| Service: | Executive Office |
| Date prepared: | 24/4/23 |
| Further enquiries to: | Will Oulton |
| Direct contact: | William.Oulton@Wiltshire.gov.uk |

With inflation and energy costs still high, Wiltshire Council continues to provide support to people through the cost-of-living crisis. Wiltshire Council has a range of advice and support at www.wiltshire.gov.uk/cost-of-living.

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 on this can be found at [Overview - Wiltshire Council](#).

Household Support Fund

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 Pensions 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. The council is in the process of finalising its plans for the fund and will have more information soon.

Support in Libraries

Although the temperatures have risen, Wiltshire Council's 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. 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 a number of 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.

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.