

## **COST OF LIVING CRISIS UPDATE**

### **Executive Summary**

The Cost-of-Living Summit on the 27<sup>th</sup> September 2022 had a positive turnout. Those that attended from the Council included the Leader and Deputy Leader, Cllr Nicholson the Portfolio Holder for Health and Wellbeing, Cllr Akberali, Cllr Aziz and Cllr Raja. Officers included representation from Communities, representing Health and Wellbeing, Community Development, Communications, Revenue and Benefits, Volunteer Woking and Business Liaison.

Wider representation included the Lighthouse, Surrey Coalition of Disabled People, Woking Environment Action, Surrey Minority Ethnic Forum, Welcome Church, Thamesway, Christians Against Poverty (CAP), Police, Surrey County Council, Freedom Leisure, DWP, Citizen's Advice, Ashford and St. Peter's Hospital, Sheerwater Together, Foodwise, Woking Foodbank and Knaphill Community Fridge.

During the day, guests worked collaboratively to identify the needs of the Woking communities, particularly those who may be overlooked, the current strengths, gaps in provision and areas for development.

The Council and partners acknowledge that we cannot solve all problems but by working together we can strengthen our offer to support those who are vulnerable this Winter and beyond. Positive progress is already being made because of the Summit and the Borough has more designated 'warm hubs' than in any other part of the County which will help residents this Winter. The food supply for households in need will be more coordinated and resilient, and residents will all have current information online and in print to signpost them to local and national support.

The action plan should be read in conjunction with the Council's Health and Wellbeing Action Plan, reported to the Health and Wellbeing Task Group. This covers a wide range of activity to support residents in line with the Council's Health and Wellbeing priorities.

### **Recommendations**

The Executive is requested to:

#### **RESOLVE That**

the success of the Cost-of-Living Summit be noted and the Executive to receive regular reports on progress against the action plan.

### **Reasons for Decision**

Reason: To ensure Woking residents access the support they need this Winter with the Cost of Living and to monitor progress against the action plan.

The Executive has the authority to determine the recommendation(s) set out above.

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**Background Papers:** None.

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### 1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 On the 27<sup>th</sup> September 2022 Woking Borough Council facilitated the Cost-of-Living Summit at Eastwood Leisure Centre in Sheerwater. Seventy people attended representing a breadth of organisations across sectors. They included Members and Officers from Woking Borough Council, Officers from Surrey County Council, the DWP, Police, Health, and many from the faith and voluntary sector including Surrey Minority Ethnic Forum, Surrey Coalition of Disabled People, The Lighthouse, Woking Environment Action and MASCOT Hub.
- 1.2 The summit was opened by the Leader of the Council and Chief Executive who shared the vision and purpose for the day, in line with the Council's strategic priorities. The themes focussed on the need to come together, not to try to solve all the challenges of the cost of living but to work in partnership to strengthen the local offer for residents, through collaboration and defining outcomes through an action plan.
- 1.3 The action plan is to be reviewed regularly by the Executive and is the focus of this report. It is a dynamic document and will evolve to include new initiatives as they arise.

### 2.0 Cost of Living Summit

- 2.1 The Council's Corporate Leadership Team facilitated the exercises throughout the day. Time was given to allow for conversations around tables to define the concerns and the needs of Woking communities. The discussion was informed by presentations from the Woking Foodbank and Citizen's Advice Woking, who set the national and local context, highlighting the increase in requests for support across all Wards in the Borough.
- 2.2 Participants spent time discussing what is already strong in Woking, regarding support for food, energy, wellbeing and finances. The gaps were then mapped which led into action-planning. The focus of the plan was to identify realistic developments that could be made locally, to strengthen community support during the next six months and beyond. The attendees worked together to identify what more could be done and ways to work together better regarding these critical areas.
- 2.3 The overriding themes for development included boosting local community support offers by providing accessible spaces for warmth and essential needs, including information and guidance on energy-saving, in line with the national 'warm hub' initiative. These need to be spaces where people can seek support but without stigma, building on existing support networks across the Borough.
- 2.4 Participants highlighted the need to ensure that communication is clear and readily accessible for residents throughout the Winter period. This needs to be available digitally, and in an accessible format for those residents who are not online. Representatives from the local food banks, community fridges and community shops were keen to collaborate and following the summit there will be a focus groups specifically for these providers to work together intentionally, led by the Woking Foodbank Manager. Information was also shared on local funding opportunities including supporting donations from the private sector to the Woking Community Fund.
- 2.5 The action plan should be read in conjunction with the Council's Health and Wellbeing Action Plan that covers a wide range of activity to support residents in line with the Council's Health and Wellbeing priorities. The Health and Wellbeing Action Plan is reported to the Health and Wellbeing Task Group, for further information.

### **3.0 Corporate Strategy**

3.1 The Council is committed to supporting Healthier Communities. The Cost-of-Living Summit was a positive and pragmatic way to bring local support networks together to strengthen the local offer for residents for this Winter and beyond.

### **4.0 Implications**

#### Finance and Risk

4.1 The action plan does not increase financial risks on the Council and seeks to strengthen support for vulnerable residents through collaboration and early intervention.

#### Equalities and Human Resources

4.2 The summit included representation from a range of communities who inputted into the day.

#### Legal

4.3 There are no significant legal implications.

### **5.0 Engagement and Consultation**

5.1 The Cost-of-Living Summit was a successful way to bring local stakeholders together, to collectively identify what can be done to strengthen the local offer. Feedback from the event was positive and one representative wrote, "I wanted to drop you a note to say thank you for a fruitful day at the Cost-of-Living Crisis Summit. There was good content, and the different sessions and conversations across the day were encouraging."

REPORT ENDS

**Appendix 1**

**Cost of Living Action Plan**

	Activities	Lead Person & wider stakeholders	Target date	Progress	Date Completed
1.	<p><b><u>Communication</u></b>  <i>Ensure that communication is clear, accessible and updated for residents and partners throughout the period.</i></p> <p><i>This was key area highlighted at the Cost-of-Living Summit and participants stressed the importance of connecting the local offer both digitally and for those without regular access to the internet.</i></p>				
1.1	<p>Woking Borough Council to ensure information from national and County sources are updated on website.</p>	<p>Andy Denner (WBC) SCC</p>	<p>Initially October 2022- Ongoing</p>	<p>The Council's website includes a range of support for households. This includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Financial payments</li> <li>• Preventing homelessness</li> <li>• Help for families</li> <li>• Foodbanks and ways to reduce food costs</li> <li>• Bill saving advice</li> <li>• Managing debt and mental health</li> <li>• Local helpful organisations</li> </ul> <p><a href="http://www.woking.gov.uk/costofliving">www.woking.gov.uk/costofliving</a></p> <p>This is an important 'go-to' place for Woking residents, linking with the countywide offer, and will be continually updated.</p> <p>SCC are currently developing a COL online tool for residents. This will advise any resident which benefits they are entitled to during this period. When the tool is launched, it will be promoted through WBC channels and support given to residents to use the tool in the Warm Hubs across the borough.</p>	<p>October 2022 – ongoing</p> <p>TBC</p>

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1.2	Woking magazine to include support for residents in Winter edition, supporting those who are unable to access online services.	Andy Denner (WBC)	October 2022	<p>Cost of Living support services included in Woking Magazine Winter Edition, delivered to c,50,000 households. This is important so that all residents have access to the information they need, including those who do not regularly use the internet.</p> <p>The central spread in the magazine consists of a wide range of support for residents. The information has been sent to Woking households and complements the Surrey County Council Cost of Living brochure delivered to all Surrey residents.</p> <p>Winter 2022 edition: <a href="http://www.woking.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/about-council/woking-magazine">www.woking.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/about-council/woking-magazine</a></p>	October 2022
1.3	Volunteer Woking to ensure the website links to the key areas and information is shared to the local voluntary and faith sector through newsletter.	Elspeth Andrews (WBC)	Ongoing	<p>Volunteer Woking has created a Wellbeing section on website. Ongoing update required. This complements the wider information available to residents, providing another access point for information.</p> <p>Volunteer Woking: <a href="#">Health &amp; Wellbeing – Volunteer Woking</a></p> <p>Volunteer Woking will include the SCC COL tool in its regular newsletter and briefings for Woking charities when the tool is available. It will also promote the need to support residents who may be 'digitally excluded', in conjunction with the Council's local health and wellbeing partnerships.</p>	October 2022 – ongoing  TBC
1.4	Explore using the 'Hello Lamp Post' to promote the COL support services across the borough.	Lynette Lawson-Tyers (WBC)	December 2022	The 'Hello Lamp Post' initiative refers to the 'talking lamp posts' and/or statues across the borough. It was successful in promoting the Town Centre Master Plan consultation. It enables residents in the town centre and across the borough to scan a QR code and interact digitally with the statue/lamp post. The COL information including the COL tool could be promoted using this mechanism.	TBC

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2.	<p><b>Warm Hubs</b>  <i>Support residents with affordable local places to spend time this Winter, providing support and guidance for household needs. Warm Hubs were an important discussion point in the Cost-Of-Living Summit. The need for these to be accessible, engaging and without stigma was highlighted. This action plan incorporates mapping, promotion, training and additional funding for Warm Hubs in Woking.</i></p>				
2.1	<p>Map warm hub spaces in areas of need across the borough including community, leisure and charity venues.</p>	<p>Jack Gallop (WBC) &amp; Jess Lee (SCC)</p>	<p>November 2022</p>	<p>'Warm Hubs' have been mapped across the borough including MASCOT Hub in Sheerwater, The Lighthouse in the town centre and St. Andrew's café in Goldsworth Park. These are identified as providers for targeted areas of need.</p> <p>Wider support is provided in the Centres for the Community, Eastwood Leisure Centre (free family activity on Sundays) and various faith centres.</p> <p>Map of 'Warm Hubs' launched 1<sup>st</sup> November 2022:  <a href="http://www.surreycc.gov.uk/health-and-welfare/support/welfare-support/everyday-living/warm-hubs/list-of-warm-hubs-in-surrey#Woking">www.surreycc.gov.uk/health-and-welfare/support/welfare-support/everyday-living/warm-hubs/list-of-warm-hubs-in-surrey#Woking</a></p> <p><i>***Updated information and corrections have been shared with SCC 01/11/22 to ensure Woking's list covers all the provision planned across the borough, as described above.</i></p>	<p>October 2022</p> <p>November 2022</p>
2.2	<p>Ensure energy advice training is completed.</p>	<p>Jess Lee (SCC)</p>	<p>November 2022</p>	<p>Expert training is available to a representative within each District and Borough to support the Warm Hubs. The Community Link Officer (SCC) for Woking, will ensure this training is available for the hubs and administer this.</p>	<p>TBC</p>

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2.3	Promote energy and finance support in all warm hub spaces and wider leisure and community venues using SCC promotion material.	Andy Denner (WBC)  Jess Lee (SCC)	November 2022	<p>WBC have produced banners promoting support for households, outlining the areas within this action plan. These are being promoted at the Working Together for Woking event (volunteer fair) at the Leisure Centre 03/11/22.</p> <p>Following the above, the banners will be displayed in public places, once the wider SCC promotion material including the COL Tool has been confirmed.</p>	November 2022  TBC
2.4	Ensure warm hubs are funded where required, through SCC available funding.	Jack Gallop (WBC) & Jess Lee (SCC)	November 2022	Funding from SCC to be confirmed for providers, if required to support additional resource including utilities and provisions.	TBC



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3.	<p><b>Food</b> <i>Develop a cohesive food support offer across the borough.</i></p> <p><i>It was highlighted at the Cost-Of-Living Summit that there is a well-stocked, central Foodbank that is connected across the borough. There is scope to develop the offer further and to bring the different providers together to achieve a local offer that is even better connected, sharing good practice and increasing resilience.</i></p>				
3.1	<p>Create a food focus group to bring together the Foodbank, Community Store, Community Fridge and wider support together; to share ideas and resources and innovate together.</p>	<p>Alison Buckland (Woking Foodbank) &amp; boroughwide partners</p>	<p>December 2022</p>	<p>Creating this food focus group, led by the voluntary sector, will make it easier to connect resources and link with wider health and wellbeing priorities. The Foodbank approach is to support crisis needs and to signpost to wider support where appropriate. Updates from this group will be included as they develop over the Winter period.</p>	<p>TBC</p>
3.2	<p>Explore options for a town centre 'Grocery' store managed and funded by Welcome Church.</p>	<p>Dub Everitt (Welcome Church) &amp; Ian Tomes (WBC)</p>	<p>Q4 2022/23</p>	<p>Welcome Church are committed to delivering a 'Community Grocery' store. This initiative is similar to the 'Shopwise' store in Sheerwater run by Foodwise. Customers have a membership and can use the store to purchase a range of items at discounted prices; 10 items for 3 pounds.</p> <p>The membership element enables the customers to be supported to engage in various courses including debt advice and employment support. The initiative is based on a 'hand-up not hand-out' principle rather than crisis support so complements the wider offer.</p> <p>Welcome Church and WBC Estates are exploring potential venues to run the Community Grocery.</p>	<p>TBC</p>

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3.3	Explore options for a Surrey food distribution hub, bringing Fareshare food stock (unused wholesale food) into the area to be distributed.	Martin Vodden (Foodwise) & Adam Thomas (WBC)	Q4 2022/23	<p>The purpose of this initiative is to increase the supply chain of food into the County using food stock that would otherwise be wasted by wholesalers. The stock is not near its sell-by date; it may be wasted due to a supply/demand issues or a packaging defect.</p> <p>Fareshare Sussex (<a href="http://www.faresharesussex.org.uk">www.faresharesussex.org.uk</a>) are the supplier and local Woking/Guildford charity Foodwise (<a href="http://www.foodwisetlc.care">www.foodwisetlc.care</a>) are the conduit to using and distributing the food stock across the County.</p> <p>WBC Officers have been working with Foodwise to support the initiative. It will benefit Woking residents through local food provision, plus stock for wider Surrey D&amp;Bs and the voluntary and faith sector to use. Currently all Fareshare stock is transported to Surrey from Brighton which is not efficient.</p> <p>Start-up capital funding for this project is being explored by Surrey County Council.</p> <p>Foodwise and Fareshare are exploring a warehouse in Sheerwater to lease from WBC, plus wider larger venues.</p>	<p>October 2022</p> <p>TBC</p>
3.4	Expand cooking classes for vulnerable residents delivered by Foodwise.	Martin Vodden (Foodwise) & Nicola Norman (WBC)	November 2022	<p>This action supports vulnerable families to learn to cook healthily on a budget. It therefore also supports the Council's health and wellbeing priority of reducing obesity.</p> <p>A new cooking class commenced 02/11/22 at Parkview Centre for the Community, delivered by Foodwise and supported by the Family Centre. Another new class commenced in Knaphill during half term in partnership with the Knaphill Community Fridge. Outcomes from the courses to be updated.</p>	November 2022 - ongoing

	Activities	Lead Person & wider stakeholders	Target date	Progress	Date Completed
4.	<p><b>Financial Support</b>  <i>Support resident to access direct financial support through Central Government schemes. Support local funding initiatives for the voluntary sector and employment support services.</i></p>				
4.1	<p>Distribute the Household Support Fund to households who are eligible.</p>	<p>Adam Thomas (WBC)</p>	<p>March 2023</p>	<p>In 2022/23 to date, £201,187 has been distributed to households through the 2nd tranche of the Household Support Fund. This targeted pensioners and vulnerable families and was successfully spent within the Q2 deadline.</p> <p>A further £192,105 to be distributed this financial year from tranche 3, with a particular focus on supporting people with disabilities. Initial planning meeting scheduled 03/11/22 with the DWP to explore options for distribution and targeting households. Residents will also be able to apply to the Council (or partners) themselves for support.</p>	<p>September 2022</p> <p>TBC</p>
4.2	<p>Woking Works to promote the Woking Community Fund to local businesses, to increase donations from the private sector to the fund.</p>	<p>Chris Norrington (WBC) &amp; Taravat Taher-Zadeh (Community Foundation for Surrey)</p>	<p>March 2023</p>	<p>Promoting the Woking Community Fund is a way to encourage local businesses to donate to the endowment, to increase sustainable community grants to the voluntary sector in Woking. Details of the fund can be found here: <a href="http://www.cfsurrey.org.uk/fund/woking-community-fund/">www.cfsurrey.org.uk/fund/woking-community-fund/</a></p> <p>A joint planning meeting with Woking Works, Volunteer Woking and the Community Foundation for Surrey was completed in October. Actions form the meeting include recruiting new panel members who will actively promote this to local businesses across the Woking communities.</p> <p>Updates and progress to follow.</p>	<p>October 2022</p> <p>TBC</p>
4.3	<p>Support young people (16-25) in receipt of benefits to secure employment. The Woking Youth Hub to meet its 2022/23</p>	<p>Cathy Leamon (Surrey Care Trust)</p>	<p>March 2023</p>	<p>The Woking Youth Hub is funded through the DWP and delivered by Surrey Care Trust, based from Moorcroft Centre for the Community. To date since its inception in April 2021 it has supported 95 young people to successfully move off benefits and into employment.</p>	

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	target of supporting 150 young people.			At the end of Q2 this year the Woking Youth Hub had supported 86 young people and achieved 30 job outcomes which is a good achievement.	September 2022
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