

COST OF LIVING CRISIS UPDATE

Executive Summary

This report is an update on the Woking response to the cost-of-living crisis. In September 2022, the Council hosted a cost-of-living summit and a joint action plan involving a range of partners was presented to the Executive in November. Two months on, progress is being made to support vulnerable residents through a range of outputs, linking with strategic networks and partnerships to provide local data and intelligence.

National data is provided through Citizen's Advice and highlights the stark increase in demand and need across the Country this Winter. Of note, by the end of November 2022, Citizen's Advice nationally reported seeing more people unable to afford their prepayment meter top ups than for the entirety of the previous six years combined. Locally, Citizen's Advice Woking have also seen a significant increase in this need, plus increased food support and wider needs, including for people with disabilities. The Household Support Fund is one way of helping people with these needs and the cost-of-living action plan highlights many of the local initiatives developing across the voluntary sector in Woking and Surrey.

19 Warm Hubs have been created and promoted across the Borough this Winter. This report provides an overview of the feedback from these. Support includes activities for families, the elderly and practical provision including food, debt advice, monetary support and practical items to help keep people warm in their homes. The online energy tool designed by Surrey County Council will be launched imminently and this will be a helpful resource for all residents. The Warm Hubs will be places that can provide support for people to access this if they are unable to do so independently.

The Council remains committed to supporting residents through this period and will continue to develop the wider offer with its partners in a joint response.

Recommendations

The Executive is requested to:

RESOLVE That

the ongoing local response to the Cost-of-Living crisis from the Council, partners, and organisations across the voluntary and faith sector be noted, in line with 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 In September 2022 the Council brought local stakeholders together to plan how best to support vulnerable residents locally this Winter in view of the increasing challenges due to the Cost-of-Living crisis. The action plan that followed this event was reported to the Executive in November 2022. Two months on, this report provides a current review of the need using local and national data, updates from the organisations providing support including the Warm Hubs, and an updated action plan.

2.0 National and Countywide Data – Cost of Living

- 2.1 Presenting detailed data on the local effects of the cost-of-living is a challenge, however there are helpful national data sets that provide comparable insight, coupled with feedback from local support networks across the county and within the Borough. Surrey County Council has created a countywide Cost of Living Partnership Group including District and Borough Councils, the voluntary sector and representatives from Health. This is attended by the Head of Family & Community Services and a summary of national and countywide updates gained from this group is as follows:
- 2.2 Citizen's Advice (nationally) has created an online dashboard which is free for anyone to access, for further reading. Nationally, of note, by the end of November 2022 Citizen's Advice in England had already seen more people unable to afford their prepayment meter top ups than for the entirety of the previous six years combined. In the week starting 5th December 2022, they helped more people with foodbank referrals and fuel vouchers than in any other week on record, and there has been an almost fivefold increase in fuel support vouchers since March 2022.
- 2.3 Barnardo's published national findings in October 2022. Some of the headlines based on a YouGov poll of parents with children aged under 18 are that more than half of parents (54%) were forced to cut back on food spending with their family in the past 12 months. One in five parents said they have struggled to provide sufficient food due to the current cost-of-living crisis, and over a quarter (26%) said their child's mental health has worsened due to the situation. One in five parents in the poll reported having taken on new credit cards, extra debt or a payday loan.
- 2.4 In Surrey, there has been a notable increase in demand for the Surrey Crisis Fund, with 348 claims in November 2022, compared to 268 in November 2020. Citizen's Advice across Surrey has reported that between April – September 2022, 30% of people receiving support are new clients, with 66% identifying as having a disability or long-term health condition.
- 2.5 Regarding children and families in Surrey, free school meal eligibility has risen by 6% between 2021 and 2022, in real terms this is an increase from 20,711 pupils in 2021/22 to 22,093 in October 2022. Children living in low-income families also rose by 11% between 2019/20 and 2020/21, the local authorities with the highest percentage increase during this period being Elmbridge, Tandridge, and Epsom and Ewell.
- 2.6 The cost-of-living crisis is arguably a complex and far-reaching area to report on and it is acknowledged that all data should be considered within its context, its source and variables. Further information on the above headlines can be found online from Citizen's Advice, Barnardo's and Surrey-i.

3.0 Woking Feedback

3.1 Warm Hubs

3.2 Warm Hubs exist to support residents throughout the Winter and are a national concept. Woking's 19 Warm Hubs can be found listed on the Council's website and include the Centres for the Community, Woking Library, The Lighthouse, MASCOT Hub and many faith centres. An online energy support tool is being launched imminently by SCC and the hubs will support residents to use it should they need it, if are not able to access it online at home.

3.3 The original local Warm Hub concept was to have one or two warm hubs in each borough, however, as described above, the voluntary and faith sector locally were keen to offer support in all areas across Woking, making these accessible to all hence 19 listed hubs. The majority of these are providing extensions to what they already offer to the Woking community, in view of the local needs and concerns as described above.

3.4 The feedback from the hubs has been mixed as would be expected considering the high number of them. One of the churches stated that they have had very little take-up on the specific warm hub offer, whereas other providers have focussed the support on wider family activities and seen greater interest. St. Michael's Church in Sheerwater see on average 20 families per week engage with their community activities and Eastwood Leisure Centre a similar amount each Sunday afternoon for their Warm Hub activity. The Centres for the Community are already used by a range of residents and have been running new free well-balanced classes for the elderly to improve fitness which has proved popular. Family Services met with groups of families over the Christmas period, and this included wider residents too seeking advice for housing and wider support.

3.5 Andy's Café in Goldsworth Park (St. Andrew's Church) has extended their café opening times, particularly over the Christmas period. They reported seeing 24 residents in the two extra mornings they opened during the festive period between Christmas and the New Year.

3.6 The Welcome Church has increased its volunteer capacity and now provide more Debt Advisors. The Church has streamlined its courses to enable more people to join and continue to run the Life Skills, Money Course and Job Club. This is alongside the existing support clubs through its welcome café and family groups.

3.7 The MASCOT Hub (Maybury and Sheerwater Community Trust) has provided extra services including family craft sessions, giving away hot water bottles, refreshments and children's clothing. The hub has supported an extra 43 individuals with this new provision in addition to its usual offer. The Lighthouse in the town centre, in addition to hosting the Woking Foodbank, created a new 'Winter Warmer' campaign. To date they have given away 172 items to adults since mid-November including hats, scarves, gloves, hot water bottles, blankets and dressing gowns, and 233 packs of warm items given to children in need.

3.8 Food Support

3.9 The Woking Foodbank has received financial support from the Household Support Fund and continues to support residents across the Borough who are in crisis. Prior to Christmas, as additional resource, the Foodbank packed over 350 Christmas bags and distributed them to families in need, working with the Salvation Army and Woking Borough Council teams to expand its reach.

3.10 It is worth noting that maintaining foodbank stock is an ongoing need and the different providers of food support are coming together early this year, as agreed at the cost-of-living summit, to plan how they can best share resource. The Woking Foodbank reported a 40% increase in referrals in December 2022 with many people being referred for emergency supplies. Positively, at this time, overall stock remains high and in conjunction with the increased

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demand, donations have increased to a record high of 10,732 kilos for December 2022; an increase of 4,130 kilos compared to December 2021. This is a great achievement and exceptional compared with most other Foodbanks. This is credit to the Woking Foodbank team and requires ongoing monitoring in coming months to ensure this sustains.

3.11 Citizen's Advice Woking and Household Support Fund

3.12 Feedback from Citizen's Advice Woking (CAW) reflects broadly the same key themes as the national data. For food, CAW report a 93% increase in foodbank referrals in 2022 Q2 and Q3 compared with 2021, and a high increase in referrals to wider charitable support for help to buy school uniform, white goods and energy payments. In September to December 2022 there has been a 36% increase in people asking for support for Personal Independence Payment (PIP) and an increase in need to support long-term disability and mental health issues.

3.13 The Council has been awarded a third tranche of the Household Support Fund (£192,105) to be distributed to residents by the end of 2022/23. This tranche will be provided to Council teams who support vulnerable residents and CAW will distribute the majority to households struggling financially, with a focus on people with disabilities. Residents will be able to apply to CAW for this additional support and the Council will be encouraging the DWP to refer their clients, especially those with disabilities, to the service. A breakdown of the spend to date of the Household Support Fund is below in the action plan.

4.0 Corporate Strategy

4.1 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.

5.0 Implications

Finance and Risk

5.1 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

5.2 The summit included representation from a range of communities who inputted into the day. Surrey Minority Ethnic Forum (SMEF) recently completed targeted engagement sessions in Woking and the outcomes when published will be included in future update reports.

Legal

5.3 There are no significant legal implications.

6.0 Engagement and Consultation

6.1 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

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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.

- 6.2 Ongoing engagement continues strategically through the Cost-of-Living Partnership Group and locally with the voluntary sector and wider teams, partners and stakeholders.

REPORT ENDS

Cost of Living Action Plan

	Activities	Lead Person & wider stakeholders	Target date	Progress	Date Completed
1.	<p><u>Communication</u> <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"> • Financial payments • Preventing homelessness • Help for families • Foodbanks and ways to reduce food costs • Bill saving advice • Managing debt and mental health • Local helpful organisations <p>www.woking.gov.uk/costofliving</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 have developed 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. To be launched January 2023.</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: www.woking.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/about-council/woking-magazine</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: Health & Wellbeing – Volunteer Woking</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>	<p>October 2022 – ongoing</p> <p>TBC</p>

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Activities	Lead Person & wider stakeholders	Target date	Progress	Date Completed
<p>2. Warm Hubs <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>				
<p>2.1 Map warm hub spaces in areas of need across the borough including community, leisure and charity venues.</p>	<p>Jack Gallop (WBC) & 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 1st November 2022: www.surreycc.gov.uk/health-and-welfare/support/welfare-support/everyday-living/warm-hubs/list-of-warm-hubs-in-surrey#Woking</p> <p>Feedback from local Warm Hubs shared in this report (January 2023)</p>	<p>October 2022</p> <p>November 2022</p>
<p>2.2 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. (Jan 2023 – SCC are still to provide this resource).</p>	<p>TBC</p>
<p>2.3 Promote energy and finance support in all warm hub spaces and wider leisure and community venues using SCC promotion material.</p>	<p>Andy Denner (WBC)</p>	<p>November 2022</p>	<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>November 2022</p>

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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.	Ongoing
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	Activities	Lead Person & wider stakeholders	Target date	Progress	Date Completed
3.	<p>Food <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) & 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>The foodbank lead is scheduling a meeting January 2023.</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>
3.2	<p>Explore options for a town centre 'Grocery' store managed and funded by Welcome Church.</p>	<p>Dub Everitt (Welcome Church) & 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>Ongoing</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 (www.faresharesussex.org.uk) are the supplier and local Woking/Guildford charity Foodwise (www.foodwisetlc.care) 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&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 Guildford. The Head of Family & Community Services (Woking) is chasing this regularly.</p>	<p>October 2022</p> <p>Ongoing</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.</p> <p>Classes successfully completed and further courses now happening in Sheerwater and Goldsworth Park.</p>	November 2022

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	Activities	Lead Person & wider stakeholders	Target date	Progress	Date Completed
4.	<p>Financial Support <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	Distribute the Household Support Fund to households who are eligible.	Adam Thomas (WBC)	March 2023	<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. The DWP are unable to directly support with targeting residents with disabilities but will refer into the scheme. Citizen's Advice Woking will therefore administer the majority of the funds, supporting their clients (as described above) and wider residents. Funds will also support vulnerable families in Housing, Family Services and help people struggling to afford essential Community Meals.</p>	September 2022 TBC
4.2	Woking Works to promote the Woking Community Fund to local businesses, to increase donations from the private sector to the fund.	Chris Norrington (WBC) & Taravat Taher-Zadeh (Community Foundation for Surrey)	March 2023	<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: www.cfsurrey.org.uk/fund/woking-community-fund/</p> <p>A joint planning meeting with Woking Works, Volunteer Woking and the Community Foundation for Surrey was completed in October. Actions from the meeting include recruiting new panel members who will actively promote this to local businesses across the Woking communities.</p> <p>Two additional Panel Members representing local businesses are being recruited to the Woking Community Fund (endowment fund) Panel. Aim is to have first business donation to the fund received April 2023.</p>	October 2022 TBC

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4.3	Support young people (16-25) in receipt of benefits to secure employment. The Woking Youth Hub to meet its 2022/23 target of supporting 150 young people.	Cathy Leamon (Surrey Care Trust)	March 2023	<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> <p>At the end of Q3 this year the Woking Youth Hub had supported 113 young people and achieved 50 job outcomes which is a highly positive achievement.</p>	January 2023
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