

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, with an update in January 2023. Two months on, progress is continuing to support vulnerable residents through a range of outputs, linking with strategic networks and partnerships to provide local data and intelligence.

Surrey Minority Ethnic Forum (SMEF) has conducted research from local communities into the effects of the cost of living. The Needs Based Assessment Report highlights key areas that are pertinent to the wider determinants of health, and these will be reported into the Woking Wellbeing Group in June 2023 for partnership discussion. Surrey Coalition for Disabled People has also reported on the effects on their members, with 97% of them reporting that the cost of living has impacted them and 35% reporting that they have borrowed money to supplement their essential income. The recommendations include ensuring that all community services are inclusive, and this has been shared with Woking community partners and will also be highlighted formally at the Woking Wellbeing Group.

The Surrey online energy advice tool has launched and is functioning. This provides tailored recommendations to residents for financial support and energy efficiency. It is available online and has been promoted through Council communications channels, partnership forums and warm hubs.

Following the Cost of Living Summit, Woking food support networks have met together to start to agree shared principles, share data and work together strategically. This includes mapping the support to identified need using local neighbourhood data and linking with the Cost of Living Partnership Group and the Surrey Food Strategy which is being developed. A focus will be on ensuring effective resources for crisis support such as foodbanks, and enabling support such as cooking classes and wider training, across the Borough.

Residents continue to be supported through the Household Support Fund and examples of impact are included in this report. The third tranche of the fund will be spent by the end of March 2023 and a full year fund for 2023/24, over £10 million for Surrey, is expected for ongoing support.

Community developments continue to progress, as updated in the action plan.

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.

Background Papers: Previous update reports presented to the Executive in [November 2022](#) and [January 2023](#).

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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 and updated in January 2023. Two months on, this report provides a current review of the need, this time focussing on particular community groups, updates from the organisations providing support including the Warm Hubs, and an updated action plan.

2.0 Ethnic Minority Communities and the Cost of Living

- 2.1 In November and December 2022, Surrey Minority Ethnic Forum (SMEF) conducted workshops in Woking and across Surrey to hear from residents from black and minoritised ethnic communities. The full findings are reported in the Needs Based Assessment Report which is published on the SMEF website: www.smef.org.uk.
- 2.2 Over 200 people took part in the focus group sessions, representing communities from Hong Kong, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Nigeria, Albania, Syria, Iraq, India, China, the Caribbean, Somalia and Nepal. The discussions focussed on the key lifestyle areas, pertinent to the wider determinants of health, including youth issues and education, access to healthcare, mental health, employment and advocacy.
- 2.3 Woking Borough Council continue to support SMEF through access to local premises, and the Woking focus group sessions for the report were conducted at Export House. SMEF attended the Woking Cost of Living Summit in September 2022, and this has helped to strengthen engagement with local community groups, creating stronger partnership opportunities. The full report and findings will be discussed in the new Woking Wellbeing Group meeting in June 2023. This will help to ensure that issues raised by residents from black and minoritised ethnic communities in Woking are incorporated into future local health and wellbeing initiatives.

3.0 Disabled People and the Cost of Living

- 3.1 The countywide Partnership Cost of Living Group met in February 2023 and Nikki Roberts, CEO of Surrey Coalition of Disabled People (the Coalition) reported on how the cost of living has affected, and continues to effect, disabled people. The full update is published on the Coalition's website: www.surreycoalition.org.uk.
- 3.2 The Coalition's members have reported the following:
 - 97% said the cost of living had impacted them;
 - 45% had gone without food at some stage this Winter;
 - 76% had not turned their heating on at some stage this Winter;
 - 43% reported no longer being able to meet the additional costs for a disabled person;
 - 62% had not made use of community fridges, warm hubs and foodbanks; and
 - 35% had borrowed money to pay bills.
- 3.3 The recommendations from the report highlight the need to recognise that disabled people have been arguably most impacted by the cost of living crisis, and ongoing support from the

Household Support Fund is required. There is also a need to ensure that community support initiatives are accessible and inclusive to disabled people.

- 3.4 Following this update, these needs have been shared by Officers with the Woking Foodbanks and Warm Hubs. In Woking, there are already delivery options for crisis food provision, and the need to prioritise disabled people and to be inclusive is paramount. The recommendations from the Coalition's work will also be shared with the Woking Wellbeing Group.

4.0 Household Support Fund Update

- 4.1 The third tranche of the Household Support Fund is still being distributed, with a deadline of the end of March 2023. A detailed update of its use can be provided in a subsequent update report once the full data has been collated. People with disabilities have been prioritised and a grant was given to Surrey Coalition of Disabled People to distribute as well as through the District and Borough Councils.

- 4.2 Locally, Woking Borough Council has been distributing small grants to households through its community services teams to target the most vulnerable residents. Citizen's Advice Woking has distributed most of the grant and residents have been able to make applications directly through them. Case studies and feedback from Woking Borough Council teams are included below.

- 4.3 Floating Housing Support staff:

- "We helped a homeless family in temporary accommodation. They had three girls under six years old girls. The fund provided essential furniture and a food voucher."
- "We helped a gentleman who had suffered a stroke and was struggling financially. His mobility was poor and he needed his car fixed. We were able to provide him with a food voucher so he could buy his food and then afford to get his car fixed which meant he was able to go out."
- "We helped a gentleman recently discharged from hospital. When we visited him at the Travel Lodge he had no money, no benefits in place and no food. We were able to buy him food for the day while we waited for Community Meals to be delivered the following day."

- 4.4 Family Services staff:

- "Mum works but only part-time, so the fund aided her with both electricity top up and with a supermarket vouchers. There are two children, and one is disabled. Mum previously fled from an abusive relationship and has started life again on her own with her children and is struggling in every area. The fund made a huge difference to the pressure on her and her mental health."
- "For another family, being able to access this fund has helped in many ways. The money allowed them to do a good food shop, stocking up on long life items as well as fresh fruit and veg which is imperative with the mother being pregnant, providing nutrients for both her and baby.

The fund also allowed them to free up some money to then pay debts, which in the long term really helped them out. They would not have been able to do this previously. They are currently in temporary accommodation with the Council and reducing their debts has allowed them to be in a better place for housing.

Both parents were so grateful for this and said, 'For this life changing help and I don't think there is anything I can say or do to express how grateful I am.'

- 4.5 The Household Support Fund will continue in 2023/24 and allocated for the whole year rather than in separate tranches as has been the case in 2022/23. Over ten million pounds will be given to Surrey County Council to be distributed. There will be a priority focus on carers and the support will be targeted as well as locally distributed, discussions for this are in progress.

5.0 Warm Hubs Update

- 5.1 The warm hub initiative was a key theme of the Cost of Living Summit and across Woking these have been a success, as highlighted in the previous update report. One warm hub in a church in Woking recently reported that operating in this way has helped to reinvigorate volunteer support to reach out to the local community which is great.
- 5.2 The Energy Advice Tool launched in February 2023. This is a free resource for residents. It provides tailored recommendations for financial support and measures to improve energy efficiency. iPads have been supplied to Surrey Coalition for Disabled People as part of the community 'Tech to Connect' scheme. Feedback and data from this online tool will be fed back through the Cost of Living Partnership Group.
- 5.3 Another initiative is to provide slow cookers to households who would benefit, with a countywide commitment to give away 500 this Winter. This scheme was piloted in Merstham, and Woking Officers have connected Foodwise to the scheme so this can be delivered in Woking. This will add further value to the Woking Foodwise cooking classes in Sheerwater, Goldsworth Park and the town centre at the Lighthouse.

6.0 Wider Community Updates

- 6.1 An action from the Cost of Living Summit was to bring the Woking providers of Foodbanks, Community Fridges and wider initiatives together to enhance their connectivity and support across the Borough. The first meeting was held this year, hosted by the Woking Foodbank and included key representatives from different organisations and community groups. A helpful discussion focussed on sharing key principles and mapping the support with neighbourhood data to target need. This includes emergency crisis support such as the foodbanks, and training and equipping interventions such as the Foodwise cooking courses and various initiatives run through Welcome Church.
- 6.2 The CEO from Fareshare Surrey & Sussex, and the CEO of Foodwise joined the meeting and updated the group on the plans for a new food distribution hub in Surrey, using surplus food through the Fareshare supply chain. Plans are progressing for this initiative, and suitable warehouses are being explored in the area.
- 6.3 The group agreed to share data and to link, through Woking Borough Council, with the Cost of Living Partnership Group. This will enable Woking to develop its local food strategy in conjunction with the wider Surrey Food Strategy which is currently being developed.
- 6.4 Welcome Church are hosting a Cost of Living Workshop on 13th March 10am-12pm in their café onsite. This will focus on practical tips for addressing the current challenges. Details of this have been shared with partners and through local comms channels.

- 6.5 The Council has launched a Cost of Living community consultation online through the Woking Community Forum. This will enable us to hear from Woking residents and engage with their needs at this time. The consultation has been shared with a wide range of partners and is live until 19th March.

7.0 Corporate Strategy

- 7.1 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.

8.0 Implications

Finance and Risk

- 8.1 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

- 8.2 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

- 8.3 There are no significant legal implications.

9.0 Engagement and Consultation

- 9.1 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".
- 9.2 Ongoing engagement continues strategically through the Cost-of-Living Partnership Group and locally with the Woking Community Forum, 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>The online energy advice tool is now launched and has been promoted through countywide and local communications channels.</p>	<p>October 2022 – ongoing</p> <p>Feb 2023</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 promoted online energy advice tool.</p>	<p>October 2022 – ongoing</p> <p>Feb 2023</p>

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2.	<p>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>				
2.1	Map warm hub spaces in areas of need across the borough including community, leisure and charity venues.	Jack Gallop (WBC) & Jess Lee (SCC)	November 2022	<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 Executive report (January 2023)</p>	October 2022 November 2022
2.2	Promote energy and finance support in all warm hub spaces and wider leisure and community venues using SCC promotion material.	Andy Denner (WBC)	November 2022	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.	November 2022
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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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>The focus group met in February 2023 and agreed to share data and work towards shared principles and a collective approach. This will link with the countywide Food Strategy that is being developed. Woking providers will map need according local neighbourhood data and develop a cohesive approach that differentiates between crisis response support (such as foodbanks) and enabling support such as training and food courses.</p>	<p>Feb 2023 – meetings 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>TBC</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)	TBC	<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 granted 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>March 23</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 March 2023
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 have been successfully recruited to the Woking Community Fund (endowment fund) Panel. First business donations were received January 2023.</p>	October 2022 January 2023

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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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