

Report of	Meeting	Date
Director (Communities)	Overview and Scrutiny Committee	Thursday, 5 October 2023

Cost of Living Action Plan - Update

Is this report confidential?	No
------------------------------	----

Is this decision key?	No
-----------------------	----

Savings or expenditure amounting to greater than £100,000	Significant impact on 2 or more council wards
---	---

Purpose of the Report

1. This report provides members with an update on the delivery of the Cost of Living Action Plan.

Corporate priorities

2. The report relates to the following corporate priorities: (Please bold one)

Housing where residents can live well	A green and sustainable borough
An enterprising economy with vibrant local centres in urban and rural areas	Healthy, safe and engaged communities

Recommendations

3. The committee notes the contents of the report.

Background to the report

4. Since the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, and subsequent financial pressures impacting upon an increasingly wide proportion of the population, the Communities team recognised the necessity to provide cost of living support to residents, and work was done to formalise this approach by creating a comprehensive Cost of Living Action Plan 2022 (Appendix 1). Delivery of the Cost of Living Action Plan was then added as a Corporate Priority for 2023/24.
5. The report that follows details work that has been carried out within the Communities service to contribute to the delivery of the Cost of Living Action Plan.

Partnerships and Communication

6. The Chorley Together and Chorley Together Food Sub-Groups have been reinvigorated, with a meeting taking place in June to communicate key council priorities including the Household Support Fund. The next meeting will take place as an event, held at the Town Hall, and will invite members of the network to communicate cost of living support updates, information about current and upcoming funding streams, and initiate dialogue around common themes, needs and experiences CT partners are seeing amongst residents, Discussion will encompass future requirement to enable organisations to continue to provide services to support our communities – which can inform our future approach.
7. The Household Support Fund (3) has been fully distributed to a total of £426000. A comprehensive plan to deliver the Household Support Fund (4) to a value of £640000 has been agreed by Executive Cabinet (Appendix 2) and delivery has commenced in earnest with the fund allocated to eight partners, including the expansion of the Warm Spaces Programme throughout the summer months as the Welcome Spaces Programme, supporting residents to access cost of living support alongside social inclusion activity.
8. We continue to collaborate with Lancashire County Council and other Lancashire district authorities through the various schemes of work. We are a key partner in shaping and contributing Lancashire wide models of delivery which include HSF, cost of living, weight management, health and wellbeing and energy related forums. We are involved in all new schemes and developments, including supporting the rollout of Lancashire Hubs in Chorley, and can benefit from any partnership models or approaches to increase efficiencies and achieve better outcomes for our residents.
9. The Affordable Warmth Grant has been distributed to 53 households to deliver 103 improvements, at a cost of £113,889.63, supporting vulnerable or at risk households to face the winter months by making enhancements such as boiler repairs, glazing repairs and loft insulation installations. Of the remaining £17,435.52, £17,325.05 has been committed for an additional 9 households. Households supported include those experiencing financial hardship, living with long term medical conditions, families with children under 5, and older adults. The success of the programme within the first 4 months saw an additional award of 50% granted by Lancashire County Council, to the great benefit of Chorley residents. Additional Affordable Warmth funding for 2024-25 has not yet been confirmed.
10. A review of existing funding streams has been conducted, with eligibility and delivery criteria updated to encourage applying organisations and groups to include a cost of living focus. The Small Community Grants and Large Community Grants funding streams have been fully allocated for 2023-24, and of the 32 organisations allocated Large Community grants, 11 reported to support individuals experiencing financial hardship, food poverty or furniture poverty. Furthermore, the Adult Health and Wellbeing grant has been developed to support adults experiencing financial barriers to access free or very low cost opportunities across the borough, with 13 delivery partners allocated a grant of up to £650 to deliver a 6 week programme promoting good health and wellbeing outcomes, with clearly defined pathways into sustainable activity.

Communications

11. A comprehensive communications plan has been developed with support from the communications team to inform residents and partners about the cost of living support available to them. This includes social media posts targeting key months of financial hardship and the development of physical resources including a cost of living postcard to distribute to households and via projects such as Warm Spaces, Household Support Fund projects and events hosted or supported within the service. The postcards have been designed to consolidate the broad range of support available to residents through the Communities service, and are able to target residents who are not digitally active.
12. Additionally, webpages have been developed and continue to be updated to allow residents and professionals to navigate these various support pathways and keep abreast of the changing landscape (www.chorley.gov.uk/costofliving). These webpage resources are shared via social media posts via network and partnership meetings and through interactions with residents through the customer services team and social prescribing. Additional resource has been allocated within the service to ensure these webpages are able to be kept as up to date as possible.
13. Briefings have been conducted with our customer services team to ensure they have current information, and are able to identify opportunities to signpost residents effectively.
14. Monthly cost of living member updates are produced by the Communities team, with input from all officers contributing to cost of living action plan delivery, providing an insight into the status of projects included within the cost of living corporate priority delivery. This update is emailed directly to all elected members.

Data, Evaluation and Monitoring

15. The Affordable Warmth Programme has made use of the NHS Winter Avoidance datasets initially, and worked alongside the Social Prescribing team throughout the programme to identify eligible residents to receive support. The Affordable Warmth grant has been promoted widely amongst relevant support networks.
16. The monitoring data gathered across various workstreams, and specifically those pertaining to cost of living support, have been redesigned to gather a wide variety of measures, including case studies and recorded conversations, to provide a clearer picture of how services currently support residents, and how these can be adapted and improved upon. This will be captured in a report in Quarter 3.
17. A Communities team training review has identified a need for Communities officers to receive additional development to enable the effective implementation of appropriate research methodologies in community settings, to include appreciative enquiry, community asset-based enquiry, and participatory practice. Work is currently underway with UCLan to develop a bespoke CPD course for the team. Additionally, the team are due to undertake intermediate Excel training in October to ensure they have the skills and understanding available to them to record, interrogate and present monitoring information across various workstreams.

On the Ground Activity

18. HAF 2023-24 summer delivery has been successfully completed. The total HAF funded attendees engaged over the summer holiday period is 1,409 (this total does not take into account how many sessions these individuals accessed each). There were 10,896 places secured for this delivery period, of which 10,728 spaces were booked and 8,819 places were filled (i.e. the booking was attended). This is an attendance rate of 82% and underscores a very successful delivery period. This year's HAF programme is fully costed, with Christmas delivery planned and all available spaces allocated to delivery partners. A procurement exercise seeks approval at Executive Cabinet in October for a successful provider to undertake all responsibilities associated with delivering the HAF programme for 2024-25, with a commitment to developing the programme to work towards Council priorities.
19. The Food Club network in Chorley expanded in April, with 5 clubs delivered by Chorley Buddies now servicing some of Chorley's most vulnerable residents in Clayton Brook, Chorley Town East, Buttermere, Adlington and Coppull. Since January, the Food Clubs have supported 7,262 shoppers. Support services regularly visit the Food Clubs to engage residents with additional support offers. These include; Citizen's Advice Bureau, Tippy Toes, Jigsaw, Places for People, Homestart, Key Unlocking Futures, Children and Family Wellbeing Service, Quit Squad Christians Against Charity and the Social Prescribing Team. The Food Clubs are also working with Tempo and Chorley Council to improve their time credits offer for volunteers and residents alike.
20. The Council also commission and grant fund services through Chorley Help the Homeless. This provides an open and accessible service offering support and information which meets the diverse needs of all users and offers a range of support groups, courses, and activities. This includes emergency support by means of foodbank, clothing Bank for clean dry clothes, sleeping bags, tents for street homeless and Household Bank. Provision of meals on several days per week to include breakfast, lunch, hot meals in winter months plus hot drink provision. Provide benefit advice and help with appeals, a general housing advice and signpost to Council Housing Team when applicable.
21. The Council also commission and grant fund food support services through Living Waters. This provides a food provision service to support residents who need support with food related assistance, and to provide opportunities for improving life skills. It aims to support residents to avoid/step down from crisis situations, tackle financial hardship, and provide skills/education to support building resilience and self-help. By providing this service and access to early help and support, this would reduce the need for more costly interventions by statutory services. The intent is to reduce the dependency of the need for food parcels, by creating opportunities for the most vulnerable in our community to increase knowledge and skills. This will include sessions to be able to prepare healthy, nutritious meals for themselves and their families, and to manage food on a limited budget, as well as other basic skills training offered such as numeracy and literacy skills, which will include access to related qualifications to support employment opportunities.
22. A resource pathway has been developed as shareable graphics (Appendix 3) that demonstrate the interconnected relationships between the Communities service and the partners, stakeholders and networks the service works alongside, as well as the interconnected relationships between teams within the Communities service (and wider

council). These graphics can be utilized at a partnership level to provide insights and demonstrate pathways into, within, and out of the service.

23. A report has been produced scoping the need, opportunity, and resource required to effectively address furniture and white goods poverty in the borough and provide a responsive, high quality and sustainable pathway of support (Appendix 4). Next steps from this report will be explored as the cost of living action plan progresses to 2024-25.

24. Since the start of the 23/24 financial year, the stats for the Handyperson service are as follows (figures correct up to 31st August 2023)

	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	
Number of Handyperson jobs completed	39	24	52	44	57	
Handyperson - Types of jobs:						TOTAL
Accident Prevention/Trip Hazards	15	7	17	12	21	72
Security	13	9	1	1	14	38
Joinery/small repairs	11	6	31	31	14	93
Energy Efficiency – Affordable Warmth	0	2	3	0	8	13
% accessing Handyperson service free of charge	93%	73%	41%	59%	83%	

25. There has been a total of 216 handyperson jobs undertaken in the first 5 months of the year, the highest proportion being joinery/small repairs (93) followed by accident prevention/trip hazards (72). It is expected that the energy efficiency referrals will increase as the energy efficiency corporate priority project is more widely promoted to residents, and household assessments begin.

26. Following on from the Uniform Swap scheme offered by the Communities Team during the Covid lockdown periods, all schools in Chorley received an invitation to set up their own Uniform Swap Scheme. Many schools were able to report that they already managed their own scheme. The remaining schools have received a continued offer of support which includes a guidance resource, offer of physical resources and offer of uniform stock. There has been some response from schools who have now implemented their own uniform swap scheme using the offered support. Over the summer holiday period there were 2 school uniform pop ups coordinated in Clayton Brook and Chorley Town Centre alongside Chorley Buddies and Clayton Brook Residents Group.

27. The Debt Aware Foundation have historically delivered Money Management programmes in schools, helping children to understand key terms and discern between 'wants' and 'needs'. These sessions have been adapted for an adult audience and delivered as a 'train the trainer' model initially to Homestart staff and volunteers to enable them to deliver this programme to the families they engage with. Following this,

the session will be offered to the wider VCFS community to reach a wider range of residents.

28. Following the digital support corporate priority 2022-23, a clear digital support pathway has been identified alongside a local directory of support which is available online for organisations and support services to refer individuals into, including free training sessions and access to digital devices - [Digital Chorley - Chorley Council](#).
29. Following the levels of engagement with the Warm Spaces programme, and the wide range of benefits attendees were experiencing beyond accessing warmth, the programme was extended across the summer months as 'Welcome Spaces' which focused on enhancing existing community activity with an offer of device charging, access to wifi, signposting into support services and access to either a free meal or household essential items.

Psychological and Wellbeing Support

30. A 6-week confidence course has been developed alongside UDevelop, taking referrals from the Social Prescribing Team and Adult Weight Management Programme amongst other external groups. Delivered at Chorley Sheds, the programme which is currently on its 5th cohort has been achieving outcomes such as improved mental health, pathways into continued membership at Chorley Sheds, pathways into training, volunteering and education opportunities, referrals into other support services and pathways into employment.
31. The Communities service are currently delivering a corporate priority to deliver an adult health and wellbeing programme. As part of the delivery of this programme a grant fund is being managed for the local VCFS sector and local businesses to apply for grants of upto £650 to deliver a low-cost or free programme of activity aimed at individuals experiencing financial barriers to continuing health and wellbeing activity, or beginning health and wellbeing activity. The grant fund is providing safe and sustainable routes for the VCFS sector and small businesses to trial new activity targeting a new audience with a route into longer-term sustainable activity.
32. 5 'Healthy Lives' webpages have been designed around the 5 ways to wellbeing, and are currently being implemented using the Chorley Leisure website platform. These pages utilise national health sector strategies, guidance and interventions through the lens of local data and priorities, providing a first point of contact for residents looking to understand more about their own health, and working towards better health and wellbeing.

Climate change and air quality

33. The work noted in this report has an overall positive impact on the Councils Carbon emissions, the wider Climate Emergency and sustainability targets of the Council. The projects delivered within the cost of living action plan actively work to reduce emissions, improve energy efficiency in homes, and reduce waste.

Equality and diversity

34. The projects and funding streams noted within the cost of living action plan are subject to their own impact assessments and equality and diversity protocols.
35. All commissioned services require the successful provider's compliance with the council's policies and statutory requirements including Equality and Diversity.

Risk

36. Risks have been identified and mitigated using the corporate priority mandate.

Comments of the Statutory Finance Officer

37. The report is for noting – there are no financial implications arising.

Comments of the Monitoring Officer

38. The report is for noting – there are no legal implications arising.

Background documents

Household Support Fund 2023-24 Delivery – Executive Cabinet Report (included under Appendix 2)

Appendices

List the appendices in the order that they are attached to the report with titles as appropriate. Any spreadsheets/diagrams should be in pdf format and be headed up.

Appendix 1 – Cost of Living Community Action Plan 2022

Appendix 2 – Household Support Fund 2023-24 Delivery – Executive Cabinet Report

Appendix 3 – Resource Pathway Road Maps

Appendix 4 - Furniture Poverty White Goods and Furniture Recycling Scheme Report

Report Author:	Email:	Telephone:	Date:
Bernie Heggarty, Laura Hendi (Neighbourhood Priorities Officer, Senior Community Engagement Officer)	bernie.heggarty@chorley.gov.uk, Laura.Hendi@chorley.gov.uk		

This decision will come into force and may be implemented five working days after its publication date, subject to being called in in accordance with the Council's Constitution.