

Report of	Meeting	Date
Director (Communities)	Chorley Liaison	Wednesday, 24 January 2024

Cost of Living Action Plan - Update

Is this report confidential?	No
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Is this decision key?	No
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Savings or expenditure amounting to greater than £100,000	Significant impact on 2 or more council wards
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Purpose of the Report

1. This report has been prepared to provide an update on the delivery of the cost of living action plan.

Recommendations

2. The contents of the report are noted.

Corporate priorities

3. The report relates to the following corporate priorities:

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

Background

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. 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 team to contribute to the delivery of the cost of living action plan to date.

Partnerships and communication

6. Chorley Together and the Chorley Together Food Sub-Group have been reinvigorated, with meetings taking place over the year to communicate key council priorities, including the Household Support Fund, cost of living support updates, information about current and upcoming funding streams, and dialogue around prevailing themes, needs and experiences. The coming meeting will focus on a past year review, gap analysis, and a discussion of future planning. Chorley Together is positioned well to provide a central point of support, information and partnership working amongst Chorley's VCFSE sector.
7. With support from Lancashire County Council, a funding and grant management course will be delivered by April 2024 and will provide high quality training in finding and bidding for funding at all levels, and the management of the grant requirements. The course will target VCFSE organisations in Chorley that provide invaluable activity to support residents experiencing challenges, including cost of living challenges.
8. Chorley Council have been awarded £640000 as a Household Support Grant for delivery between June 2023 and 31st March 2024. As of the 31st December 2023, the total amount spent is £511,882, which has supported 12,425 households. A breakdown of who the grant has supported, and the theme of support can be seen in the tables below:

Household Demographic	Amount	Households supported
Households with Children	£212,210	5085
Households with Pensioners	£78,080	1326
Household with Single occupier or Couple	£180,058	5767
Households - Other	£41,534	247

Support by Category	Amount	Households
Energy and Water	£289,363	2358
Food	£88,901	8692
Essential Items	£21,107	108
Advice Services	£50,000	1242
Housing	£14,999	14
Essentials linked to Energy and Water	£20,010.85	11

9. We continue to collaborate with Lancashire County Council and other Lancashire district authorities through various schemes of work. We are a key partner in shaping and contributing Lancashire wide models of delivery which include Household Support

Fund, 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.

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 to engage with health and wellbeing improving activities, with 13 delivery partners allocated a grant of up to £650 to deliver a minimum 6 week programme promoting good health and wellbeing outcomes, with clearly defined pathways into sustainable activity. The outcomes from this grant are currently being collated to be reported in March.

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 via projects such as Warm Spaces, Household Support Fund projects, events hosted or supported within the service, the home energy efficiency scheme, and social prescribing team. The postcards have been designed to consolidate the broad range of support available to residents through the Communities service, targeting residents who are not digitally active, and signposting them to Council support.
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, 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. A triaging role has been established within the Communities service to provide a range of initial support, advice, guidance and signposting information to residents contacting the council for cost of living support. Through their detailed understanding of services available across sectors in Chorley, they're able to give a comprehensive first support response to residents.
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 and Communities triaging officer to identify eligible residents to receive support. Aligning EPC ratings with the Efficiency Improvability Index, residents with the poorest home energy efficiency on record with opportunity to improve this rating were targeted for the home energy efficiency programme
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.
17. During quarter 3, projects will draw together monitoring and evaluation to provide insight into the impacts of the cost of living action plan and associated activity across the year. This will be utilised to update the cost of living action plan 2024.

On the Ground Activity

18. The Holiday Activity and Food (HAF) 2023-24 programme delivery has been successfully completed. Christmas delivery data continues to be collated and an annual report will be generated from this. Drawing on data across the year, delivery continues to improve across all elements of the programme, including the food offer, number of bookings versus spaces available, and number of attendances versus bookings made. The steering group continues to develop to add additional value to the HAF programme by linking HAF families with available support systems and opportunities.
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. The food clubs alone support on average 250 shoppers per week or over 13,000 per year, as well as engaging 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, the Social Prescribing Team and the Home Energy Efficiency Programme.
20. The Affordable Warmth Grant supports vulnerable or at-risk households to face the winter months by making enhancements to their homes to include; boiler repairs and replacements, glazing repairs, radiator servicing and replacement, loft hatch replacement, loft insulation installations, emergency heaters supplied, smart heating control installations and draught proofing. Households supported include those experiencing financial hardship, living with long term medical conditions, families with children, and older adults. The delivery of the home energy efficiency programme has seen an increase in referrals to the grant, as home visits unearth untapped need for substantial improvements to people's homes to face the winter months and maintain their health
21. The Council 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. There is provision of meals on several days per week to include breakfast, lunch, and hot meals and hot drinks in winter months. The service also provides benefit advice and help with appeals, a general housing advice and signposting into the council Housing Team when applicable.

22. 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.
23. Alongside Lancashire County Council and The Sewing Room, an 'Age of Inspiration' event is planned to take place by April, with the aim of gathering and celebrating targeted members of Chorley's older resident population, providing an engaging experience alongside tangible links with local services that are able to promote health, wellbeing and cost of living support and activity.
24. A resource pathway has been developed as shareable graphics (Appendix 1) 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.
25. 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 2). Next steps from this report will be explored as the cost of living action plan progresses to 2024-25.
26. 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	Sept	Oct	Nov	TOTAL
Number of Handyperson jobs completed	39	24	52	44	57	45	26	67	354
Handyperson - Types of jobs:									

Accident Prevention/Trip Hazards	15	7	17	12	21	4	11	15	102
Security	13	9	1	1	14	13	4	12	67
Joinery/small repairs	11	6	31	31	14	25	9	33	160
Energy Efficiency – Affordable Warmth	0	2	3	0	8	1	2	9	25
% accessing Handyperson service free of charge	93%	73%	41%	59%	83%	68%	75%	80%	72%

27. There has been a total of 354 handyperson jobs undertaken in the first 8 months of the year, the highest proportion being joinery/small repairs (160) followed by accident prevention/trip hazards (102). 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.

28. 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 and 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. Chorley Buddies have continued to host pop up uniform swap sessions in town centre locations throughout the year, making use of council held stock

29. 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. Training will be delivered to the social prescribing team to enable them to support individuals within their caseload experiencing budgeting challenges.

30. Following the levels of engagement with the Warm Spaces programme during winter 2022-23, and the wide range of benefits attendees were experiencing beyond accessing warmth, such as social engagement, guidance, support and signposting, 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. Currently the Warm Spaces programme continues to

support Chorley residents during the winter months of 2023-24 with a full list of Warm spaces available at www.chorley.gov.uk/warmspaces.

Psychological and Wellbeing Support

31. 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 6th 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.
32. The Communities service are delivering an adult health and wellbeing programme. As part of the delivery of this programme a grant fund is being offered 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 help them continue accessing health and wellbeing activity. The grant fund is providing safe and sustainable routes for the VCFS sector and small businesses to trial new activity with a route into longer-term sustainable activity.

Climate change and air quality

33. The work noted in this report has an overall positive impact on the Councils Carbon emissions and the wider Climate Emergency and sustainability targets of the Council.
34. In particular the report impacts on the following activities:
 - a. net carbon zero by 2030,
 - b. energy use / renewable energy sources

Equality and diversity

35. 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.
36. All commissioned services require the successful provider's compliance with the council's policies and statutory requirements including Equality and Diversity.

Comments of the Statutory Finance Officer

37. As this is for noting there are no direct financial implications of this report.

Comments of the Monitoring Officer

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

Background documents

There are no background documents for this report.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Resource Pathway Road Maps

Appendix 2 – Furniture and White Goods Poverty and Recycling Scheme Report

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