

## ITEM 8 - POSITION STATEMENT – COST OF LIVING

The Labour Group have given notice of the following Position Statement to be presented at the meeting:

“This winter, residents in Charnwood face a perfect storm of price rises which will hit those on low incomes, particularly pensioners, families, those with disabilities and other health issues. Of particular concern is the increase in utility prices.

Gas and Electricity price caps have already increased by 54% in April to £1971 pa for an average household and are forecast to rise another 82% in October to £3582 pa, with further rises expected in January 2023.

By the autumn, living costs could have risen by as much as 14% for low-income families, whilst the support they receive has only risen by 3%. Families with two children will face a shortfall of at least £1,600 – a staggering sum of money that many families simply don't have.

The Labour group asks for a position statement from the Conservative administration on how they are going to directly assist the residents of Charnwood”.

### RESPONSE:

*There are very significant economic and social pressures resulting from the international and national economy especially in relation to inflation. These come on the back of other pressures relating to workforce and supply chain disruption. The effects of which will impact not just on Charnwood residents and businesses but also on the council's finances as the cost of running services and the demand for services increase. The impact of the inflationary pressures on food and fuel are more likely to affect those who are vulnerable and lower income households. An internal officer group was established in the summer to consider the following:*

- 1. How the issue was presenting at a service level and for partners in the voluntary sector*
- 2. What support CBC currently provides*
- 3. What support partners currently provide*
- 4. What other Councils are doing or planning to do*
- 5. Consider options for adaption to services, policies or investment in projects or services*

*The officer group is meeting again on the 6<sup>th</sup> of September and will be making some recommendations later in September with a Cabinet report expected in October 2022.*

*Listed below are some of the existing and potential support for residents. Council officers are planning to reinstate the Charnwood Community Action Group as an umbrella partnership to help co-ordinate public and voluntary organisations*

responses. It is also likely that the Cabinet will be recommended to release funding from reserves to support voluntary and community groups to increase their resilience over the winter and or to deliver schemes that support residents. The proposals are likely to focus on food and fuel poverty. There may also be a need to invest in service areas such as housing needs given the increasing demand we are likely to see. It will be very important to understand what the Government does in regard to direct support particularly in relation to the cost of energy. We need to be clear that Charnwood Borough Council is not able to significantly affect these issues which are of national scale and impact.

### **Council Tax and Housing Benefits - Actions to support financial hardship:**

Council Tax payments can be spread over 12 months not just 10 to help customers reduce their monthly payment making this more manageable

Both Council Tax Support and Discretionary Council Tax support are available to customers facing financial hardship that meet the eligibility criteria. This can provide up to 100% relief for their Council Tax. Applications can be made online or where a customer needs extra support an appointment can be made to see an officer face to face

Where customers are struggling to make payments the Council actively encourage them to get in contact so we can discuss the situation, signpost to any help that maybe available or make a suitable arrangements for payment within set parameters and criteria.

Discretionary Housing Benefits can provide a top up to those customers already in receipt of Housing Benefit or the housing element of Universal Credit where their payment does not cover their full rent. In some circumstances the fund can provide 'rent in advance' and 'rent deposit' for people moving into a different property.

The Housing Benefits team work closely with the tenancy support teams to ensure applications are submitted where necessary for our tenants that will help the customers and maximise rent collection. Non housing tenants can receive help with applications for this fund if required through our Customer Service Team.

Council Tax Energy Rebate payments both for the main scheme and the discretionary scheme have all been completed or vouchers sent to customer to collect their payments. Where payments aren't collected. The value of the payments is being credited to their Council Tax account in line with the guidance.

Council housing rent - The Council's approach to the prevention and recovery of rent arrears is based on early intervention and the targeting of support at the most vulnerable. The Council has a dedicated tenancy support and financial inclusion team, consisting of 6.8 full time equivalent officers providing direct support to Council tenants though the provision of information, advice, and support on money, benefits, and debt.

## **Energy efficiency**

*The Council has signed the Green Living Leicestershire ECO4 Flexible Eligibility Statement of Intent (SOI). This statement sets out the Green Living Leicestershire partnership's flexible eligibility criteria for the Energy Company Obligation (ECO4) scheme from April 2022 - March 2026. The Council will work with Leicestershire Authorities under the partnership to deliver projects supporting energy efficiency, sustainability, and wider net zero goals. The ECO4 scheme will focus on supporting low income and vulnerable households. The scheme will improve the least energy efficient homes helping to meet the Government's fuel poverty and net zero commitments. The Council is also a member of the Sustainable Warmth Housing Sub-group. Residents can sign up to the Warm Homes Newsletter to be notified of future funding rounds and the latest advice and information supporting affordable warmth at home. The link to the newsletter can be found on our website.*

*The Council has already delivered large scale, fabric first, cavity and external wall insulation projects at its own housing stock around a decade ago, targeting the worst performing properties first. Savills UK has been appointed to undertake a high-level energy study to identify any further opportunities to improve the energy efficiency of our housing stock. New, more energy efficient, boilers have been installed at Council properties, and information around how householders may adjust their boilers to maximise efficiency has been placed on the Council's website and will be communicated to tenants directly through the Autumn tenant magazine*

## **Working with the voluntary and community sector**

*The Council already plays a key role in supporting and enabling the voluntary and community sector to support residents. The Council will reinstate with its partners the Charnwood Community Action group to help co-ordinate the response to cost-of-living pressures and in particular food and fuel poverty.*

*The current/next Charnwood Grants round will prioritise applications that help respond to the cost-of-living issues. The Council already provides funding to a range of voluntary groups through its strategic partner funding stream which includes organisations like Citizens Advice Bureau. Further grants or funding are likely to be made available to support the voluntary and community sector in their work to help vulnerable households following a Cabinet report in October 2022.*

*The Council supports several community hubs which are providing drop in access for residents to get advice and guidance. We are also a significant partner of the Your Store which is continuing to take new customers and now includes hubs in Loughborough, Mountsorrel and Shelthorpe. In addition, the Council are actively involved in the Charnwood Food Poverty network and support a range of food banks and services to those in need.*

## **Businesses**

*The Council is also concerned about the effect on local businesses and in particular small businesses who will be affected by the energy price rises and wider inflationary cost pressures. The Council is likely be part of delivering any support from national government as it was in the pandemic. We will also ensure that we provide advice and signposting to other support working with partners like the BID, FSB and Chamber of Commerce.*

## **Signposting and communications**

*The Council has created a dedicated webpage ([www.charnwood.gov.uk/costofliving](http://www.charnwood.gov.uk/costofliving)) to signpost customers to a range of different agencies which may be able to help those needing further support. For example, the page has links to advice on issues including budget and debt advice, financial support, housing, food provision and welfare and mental health support.*

*The communications team are sharing the page via the Council's social media channels and email alerts and have shared it with staff. The Council is also sharing on its channels information from the Government's Help for Households campaign which has a range of information for people concerned about the cost of living and where they can get help.*