

SCRUTINY COMMISSION - MONDAY, 3 JULY 2023

Report of the Director of Housing and Wellbeing Lead Member: Councillor Elizabeth Blackshaw

Part A

COST OF LIVING ACTION PLAN UPDATE

Purpose of Report

To provide the Scrutiny Commission with an update on the work undertaken in relation to the cost-of-living action plan.

Recommendation

That the Commission note and comment on the update and the extension of funding for initiatives that support communities facing challenges arising from the cost of living.

Reasons

To reflect the Commission's consideration of the update and the continuing work around the cost of living.

Policy Justification and Previous Decisions

On 11th October 2022 (minute 29) Cabinet resolved:

1. *that the release of £180,000 from the Reinvestment Reserve for internal and voluntary sector use to assist communities with the cost-of-living crisis be approved;*
2. *that delegated authority is given to the Chief Executive for the distribution of these funds. The submitted report set out an indicative spend plan;*
3. *that any funds unspent at 31 March 2023 are returned to the Reinvestment Reserve;*
4. *that it be noted that the Cabinet confirmed the above to be an appropriate response to the Position Statement referred to it by Council;*
5. *that the report of the Scrutiny Commission be noted.*

Reasons

1. *To provide support to communities and businesses with the cost of living crisis through a range of mechanisms.*
2. *There is a project team led by the Chief Executive and comprising of officers from across the Council who will develop a comprehensive spend plan outlining where the support will be allocated.*

3. *To ensure that financial resources are not unnecessarily earmarked and hence unavailable for alternate uses.*
4. *To acknowledge the Position Statement, its referral from Council and the response to it.*
5. *To acknowledge the work undertaken by and the views of the Scrutiny Commission.*

On 18th April 2023, the Council's Chief Executive made the following delegated decision:

That £50k from the reinvestment reserve earmarked for initiatives that support communities facing challenges arising from the cost of living is carried forward from 2022/2023 to 2023/2024.

Reason

To provide capacity for interventions that support communities facing challenges arising from the cost of living. The final 22/23 costs are £39,475.86 against a ring-fenced amount of £180k.

Implementation Timetable including Future Decisions

Initiatives that support communities facing challenges arising from the cost of living will continue to be funded through 2023/24.

Report Implications

Financial Implications

The funding is one off from Reinvestment Reserve.

Equality and Diversity

Socially excluded groups have been positively impacted through a range of activities delivered to support residents with the rising cost of living.

Climate Change and Carbon Impact

None identified.

Crime and Disorder

None identified.

Wards Affected

All wards.

Publicity Arrangements

Positive news stories relating to activity funded through the cost-of-living plan are planned.

Consultations

Not applicable.

Links to the Corporate Strategy

Caring for the Environment	Yes
Healthy Communities	Yes
A Thriving Economy	Yes
Your Council	Yes

Key Decision: N

Background Papers: CABINET - 13TH OCTOBER 2022 COST OF LIVING SUPPORT TO COMMUNITIES AND BUSINESSES

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Part B

1. Delivery Themes and Updates

The Cabinet report dated 11th October 22 *Cost of Living Support to Communities and Businesses* identified a number of high-level themes and options where the Council could offer further support. These are set out in the below table along with a progress update.

Theme	Update
To establish Charnwood Community Action Group and provide support.	The group was established and supported the identification of pressures on communities and development of tailored responses. Complete
To provide support funding to Citizen's Advice Bureau (based on demand).	£10k grant funding provided for additional staffing to deal with an increased volume of enquiries.* Complete
To provide support to Age Concern (based on feedback of need).	£10k grant funding provided to provide winter assistance to older people.* Complete
To support food poverty via funding for a range of voluntary and community Providers.	A range of initiatives have been supported.* Complete
To support voluntary sector resilience to help with energy costs and specific projects over the winter.	A range of initiatives have been supported.* Complete
To support and enhance the ECO4 scheme.	The Council is top slicing its Disabled Facilities Grant Budget by £250k to top up LAD3 to fund energy-efficiency upgrades within the homes of low-income households. In progress
To provide printed materials for distribution to target groups which signpost people to support.	Five thousand cost of living leaflets were printed and distributed. Leaflets and posters were also produced for two events led by the Council: Let's Talk Money and

	Wellbeing event in Loughborough and the Cost-of-Living roadshow in Syston. Complete
To support local high streets and independent business with targeted advertising. In Loughborough this will be done in conjunction with the BID.	A <i>Buy Local</i> social media campaign was delivered in December 2022. Complete
Capacity budget for CBC services to meet demand.	£2,365.86 was drawn down to support the response to the cost of living.

*A summary of initiatives delivered through the plan with funding allocations / spend can be found at Appendix 1.

*Outcome information from activities delivered is currently being collated. Information received to date on the work of organisations funded can be found at Appendix 2.

Highlights from funded initiatives include:

Citizens Advice

130 clients (to 31st March 2023) have been supported with applications to the Household Support Fund and obtained £23,760 of food and fuel vouchers from the scheme.

CAB has applied to the Fuel Bank scheme for fifty-seven of these clients and obtained £2,717 of emergency payments.

Falcon Centre

Provision of a “drop in” at the day centre:

People come in often for economic benefit, warm space, affordable food, help with benefits, utilities, debt, homelessness, tenancy support, food parcels, but also the socialisation benefits as somewhere to go and somewhere they are welcome/feel comfortable and the community element.

New Life Community Church

A Family Support Worker post provided holistic support to vulnerable families:

57 families (from 1st Nov 22 to 28th Feb 23) - although some are repeat applications - received support regarding fuel and food poverty and essential white goods.

Second Time Around

Provided ‘Bare Necessities’ boxes for the most vulnerable and underprivileged people in Syston and district community. And:

Around 12 new parent bags have been provided

System Methodist Church - Warm Space

Supporting Charnwood residents in and around Syston struggling with the cost-of-living crisis by benefitting from having somewhere warm to be for as long as they like on the day of opening with free hot drinks and biscuits.

Equality Action - Casework appointments

[Increased] their caseworker capacity to support the local community in particular the BAME community.

We were able to increase our casework appointments using this funding by 10 appointments per week over 2 days on top of our other casework over the period December to March.

Age UK

Between October 2022 and 31st March 2023 we supported 354 people.

Primarily, it has enabled Age UK LS&R to give dedicated time/hours to assisting people living across Charnwood claim benefits they were entitled to, and this amounted to a total of £206,856 in confirmed benefits awarded.

In addition, our Warm & Wise Project was offered more hours to compliment the work of the charity's Advice Team. Since October 2022, they have received 79 referrals, visiting 67 people in their own homes.

It is estimated that energy bill savings from the advice received amounted to £8,807 with another £16,077.60 awarded from more general benefits applied for.

2. Financial Position

The final 2022/2023 costs were £39,475.86 against a ring-fenced amount of £180k.

A sum of £40k was initially identified for topping up the Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) budget, however this was not needed as demand was met with existing budgets.

A carry forward of £50k into 2023/2024 took place following a delegated decision, reference DD068 agreed on 18 April 2023 to make provision for extending initiatives.

A balance of £90.5k has been returned to the Reinvestment Reserve.

3. Future Planned Activity

Applications for continued funding are expected from several organisations including Age UK and the Citizens Advice Bureau.

Funding will be used flexibly over the year given that pressures on communities are likely to change with the seasons along with fluctuations in the economy and energy prices.

The Council is working with Clockwise Credit Union to hold a weeklong roadshow across Loughborough to promote benefits of the Credit Union, including responsible lending, safe savings, and accessible accounts. Clockwise will provide £10 credit to the first thirty people that sign up.

Appendices

Appendix 1 - Summary of Activities with Funding Allocations / Spend

Appendix 2 - Cost of Living Grants Fund Update - May 2023

Appendix 1 - Summary of Activities with Funding Allocations / Spend 2022/23

Organisation	Purpose of Grant / Spend	Total
Citizens Advice Bureau	Additional funding for staff role to deal with increased enquiries due to Cost-of-Living crisis	£10,000
Age UK	Winter assistance project	£10,057
Falcon Support Services	Drop-in Service (£3k funded thru CDG)	£2,000
New Life Community Church	Family worker to support foodbank clients (applied to CDG)	£1,000
Equality Action	Additional funding to offer more casework appointments	£10,000
System Methodist Church	Warm space and cost of living information point	£1,763
PACE (Pro-active community endeavour)	Tuesday Warm Space	£1,260
Second Time Around CIC	Bare Necessities project	£1,030
CBC	Support costs, venue hire, materials, advertising, and activities.	£2,365.86
TOTAL		£39,475.86

Appendix 2 - Cost of Living Grants Fund Update - May 2023

Citizens Advice Charnwood

A grant of £10,000 provided additional funding for paid staff to help deal with increased enquiries due to the cost-of-living crisis. The funding allowed us an additional 14hrs per week of paid staff time over a 9-month period.

130 clients (to 31st March 2023) have been supported with applications to the Household Support Fund and obtained £23,760 of food and fuel vouchers from the scheme.

CAB has applied to the Fuel Bank scheme for fifty-seven of these clients and obtained £2,717 of emergency payments. The Fuel Bank is used for pre-payment meter customers in crisis, who have no credit left on their meters. Without this emergency payment these clients were in a situation that would have meant deciding whether to eat or heat.

All clients assisted met the criteria for being in, or at risk of, fuel poverty.

All clients were offered a full benefit check to see if they were receiving the correct amounts and explore whether they had further benefit entitlement that had not been claimed. 70% of clients assisted had a disability or long-term health condition.

Additionally, all clients were given an energy advice appointment. The purpose of these appointments is to identify whether there are other schemes that can help:

- Warm Homes Discount
- Winter Fuel Payments
- Cold Weather Payments
- Priority Services Register
- Grants from energy companies
- Severn Trent Big Difference Scheme

All clients were given energy saving tips to encourage behavioural change to save money, and they were also asked about any debts they might have, which would then lead to an appointment with a money adviser.

Our dedicated debt adviceline is operational, and our local adviceline is open for an additional half day on Tuesdays.

Falcon Support Services

A grant of £2,000 supported the Drop-in Day Centre from December - end of Feb and the figures are:

1843 visits

232 individuals have attended the Drop-in Service/Warm Space

12 of those rough sleepers

All our attendees are struggling with the cost-of-living crisis with most of them staying inside the Drop In all day to keep warm/have a safe space and accessing the food.

587 breakfasts issued

374 lunches issued

People come in often for economic benefit, warm space, affordable food, help with benefits, utilities, debt, homelessness, tenancy support, food parcels, but also the socialisation benefits as somewhere to go and somewhere they are welcome/feel comfortable and the community element.

We are certainly seeing more people than we used to and see on average 50 people per day. A growing need is support with financial applications for items to Charity Link, Leicestershire Welfare provision, Household support fund, Glasspool etc. for white good i.e., fridge/freezers, washing machines, ovens. People do not have the spare funds to replace items when they break, and we are receiving a lot of people contacting us on their own or via The Bridge with requests to complete applications.

Our Washing Machine has been used 26 times in this period and Shower 75 times.

In December and January alone a total of £2,458.47 was spent on food costs associated with the Drop In.

New Life Community Church

A grant of £1,000 contributed to the Family Support Workers post to provide holistic support to vulnerable families.

57 families (from 1st Nov 22 to 28th Feb 23) - although some are repeat applications - received support regarding fuel and food poverty and essential white goods.

Second Time Around

A grant of £1,030 provided 'Bare Necessities' boxes for the most vulnerable and underprivileged people in Syston and district community. Boxes of essential items for members of our community who have no one or have previous substance abuse, abusive relationships and controlling partners - parents, young single couples, people who have debt and no money, elderly residents on their own and the housebound are all included on a list of Syston residents who are in need of our help, by way of putting together boxes of items bespoke to that persons personal needs.

Around 12 new parent bags have been provided (we have used all the stock we had already at the shop, Suda cream, nappies, new Babygro's, baby wipes etc.... plus 2 for new babies and the parents were overjoyed!)

Looking to the future re Bare Necessities we would probably look at the older generation with regard to basic essentials, this seems to be more than needed in the community with many older residents of a generation that they would not attend a foodbank (as the main foodbank is on the high street on a busy road) some people have said they are: "too proud to access it"; "it's not something their generation would

do”; “seems like begging” and so they are more in need but feel a stigma associated with accessing a foodbank which is sad but understandable, so maybe we can help to fill the void not with food but our Bare Necessities like: creams, wipes, towels, nightwear, pads, shampoo etc.....many of the younger people seem happy to attend a foodbank and don't see an issue with it..... so, it would be nicer to look at those who need help but don't want to ask.

Syston Methodist Church - Warm Space

A grant of £1,763 is supporting Charnwood residents in and around Syston struggling with the cost-of-living crisis by benefitting from having somewhere warm to be for as long as they like on the day of opening with free hot drinks and biscuits. This is intended to reduce energy costs at home and social isolation. The Local Area Co-ordinator, Social Prescriber and Age Concern are in the Café with information on what support is available. The warm space is open on the same day that the foodbank is open in the next building.

The Café users reflect the socio-demographic make-up of the locality and who are likely to be struggling with the cost-of-living crisis, they are:

- Mums with toddlers and young children attending the community toddler group on the same road.
- People living close by in 3 blocks of assisted housing. Many of whom live alone and are socially isolated.
- Those on low incomes and socially isolated people of all ages.

The café is run by a group of volunteers and is visited on average every week by around 25 people.

Equality Action - Casework appointments

A grant of £10,000 was awarded to Equality Action to help increase their caseworker capacity to support the local community in particular the BAME community.

We have delivered casework appointments as per our proforma, mainly on the issues facing our beneficiaries with the cost of living.

We were able to increase our casework appointments using this funding by 10 appointments per week over 2 days on top of our other casework over the period December to March. Due to Ramadan, we found April was a bit of a quiet month.

AGE UK LLR - Support work

A grant of £10,0057 was awarded to Age UK to increase their caseworker capacity. We were delighted to receive the cost-of-living grant from Charnwood Borough Council to meet the needs of vulnerable older people struggling financially because of the current financial crisis.

The grant has been used in a variety of ways and as proposed in the original grant application.

I am pleased to report that between October 2022 and 31st March 2023 we supported 354 people.

Primarily, it has enabled Age UK LS&R to give dedicated time/hours to assisting people living across Charnwood claim benefits they were entitled to, and this amounted to a total of £206,856 in confirmed benefits awarded.

In addition, our Warm & Wise Project was offered more hours to compliment the work of the charity's Advice Team.

Since October 2022, they have received 79 referrals, visiting 67 people in their own homes.

It is estimated that energy bill savings from the advice received amounted to £8,807 with another £16,077.60 awarded from more general benefits applied for.

Nine people were also referred by the project to other organisations where they could access grants for loft/cavity wall/external wall/floor insulation.

A number of presentations were also carried out by the team in Loughborough and Syston.