



Report to: Cabinet Meeting - 6 December 2022

Portfolio Holder: Councillor David Lloyd. Strategy, Performance & Finance

Director Lead: Suzanne Shead - Director - Housing, Health & Wellbeing

Lead Officer: Suzanne Shead - Director - Housing Health & Wellbeing, Ext. 5520

Report Summary	
Type of Report	Open, Non Key Decision
Report Title	Cost of Living Response
Purpose of Report	To set out the Council's approach to supporting the District through cost of living challenges and to commission further work on potential projects to support delivery of activities to help those who are in need.
Recommendations	<p>That Cabinet:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">a) note how the Council has responded so far to cost of living challenges, and approve further work on potential projects as set out for example in paragraph 2.1.1 of the report with a view to the creation of a Cost of Living Response fund to support our community objectives of creating vibrant and self-sufficient local communities where residents look out for each other and actively contributing to the local area and to improve the health and wellbeing of local residents; andb) for a further report to be brought to Cabinet with costed proposals for consideration within a cost envelope of approximately £150,000.c) grant delegated approval to the Portfolio Holder – Strategy, Performance & Finance after consultation with the S151 Officer and the relevant Portfolio Holder for any urgent individual allocations required in the interim.
Alternative Options Considered	Not to consider further projects to address cost of living challenges, however it is considered appropriate to support residents and businesses during this period.
Reason for Recommendations	To provide practical support for residents and businesses through the cost of living challenges.

1.0 Background

- 1.1 The UK is facing unprecedented rises in the cost of living from rising interest rates, increased costs for services, high fuel, energy and food bills. These challenges are not only affecting those who are already in need, but those who have previously managed to navigate the challenges are likely to find themselves in uncharted waters with little or no knowledge of how and where to seek help.
- 1.2 From April to September 2022, the Trussell Trust reported 1974 emergency food parcels were distributed (638 of these were parcels for children) representing a staggering 44% increase in just one year.
- 1.3 So far, the Council has been responding to this situation by:
 - ensuring the Discretionary Housing Payments, NCC Household Support Grants and other available hardship funds are promoted and administered as quickly as possible
 - processing the Government's energy rebate scheme promptly with c.£7.4m allocated to households
 - Signposting residents to benefits and other support via its website
 - Working with partners to ensure residents are aware of the grants available and additional support they can receive
 - Helping its tenants with debt or income related problems through funding independent debt services
 - Supporting the Food Clubs across Newark to increase food security as well as signposting to other support available.
- 1.4 Recognising there is more that can be done, the Council have pulled together how current services support businesses, residents, tenants and colleagues with these challenges, with the main principle being to do what we already do – more quickly, acting as the landing site for partner organisations to feed initiatives to, to ensure accurate and timely signposting to support available and how we target support using data and local knowledge.
- 1.5 The Council has created a page on the website to co-ordinate all information including links to existing government support around:
 - Energy bills support scheme information
 - Cost of Living payment for people on means tested benefits
 - Pensioner Cost of Living payment
 - Disability Cost of Living payment
 - Household support fund
- 1.6 The Council recognise that partners and businesses have a role to play in addressing and improving the districts resilience around:
 - Information and Communication
 - Food Security
 - Fuel and Energy
 - Health and Well-Being
 - Education and Skills

- 1.7 In November 2022, the Community Partnership (which brings together businesses and partner organisations across the district) met to discuss the current situation and highlighted a number of areas of good practice and key areas where there would be added value – in particular, how we could boost volunteering to support delivery of activities and for the benefits of giving something back and health and well-being. The Council pledged to be the central co-ordination point to publicise support for agencies and share messages as widely as possible.
- 1.8 The first local roadshow “Fuelling you with support” is being held on the 30 November in Newark, with further roadshows planned across the Sherwood area of the district. These events bring together a range of appropriate agencies who can offer advice and support and offer an opportunity to make every conversation count.
- 1.9 At a Mid-Nottinghamshire level, the Place Based Partnership is co-ordinating a Cost of Living summit to be held on-line to bring together all partners to discuss activities that are available across Mid Notts with a view to identifying a number of areas where the partnership can add value. This will be supported by health data to target initiatives where they are needed most.

2.0 Proposal

- 2.1 Responding to cost of living challenges requires the Council to be fleet of foot, with the ability to respond swiftly to changing support demands. With this in mind, a potential budget of £150,000 (£100k General Fund and £50k Housing Revenue Account) has been identified to support residents and businesses, and where possible, supporting community partners to deliver services in their neighbourhoods rather than direct delivery.
- 2.1.1 Potential projects identified include (not exhaustive):
- Operating a Fuel Bank Scheme to help people on pre-payment gas or electricity meters who are struggling to pay their bills;
 - Reviewing fees and charges;
 - Supporting a holistic approach to debts, so the Council collect with care, and restate the “No Eviction” pledge made during the pandemic, to support tenants who are engaging with us to manage council debt.
 - Expansion of food clubs throughout the district and linking in health initiatives such as flu/covid vaccines where available;
 - Promoting and signposting residents to partners who are providing warm rooms and other community-based activities to help residents receive the support they need, when they need it;
 - In conjunction with the Community Partnership, boosting volunteering to help partner organisations deliver their services;
 - Prioritising tenants with inefficient boilers in their homes to upgrade to more high rated boilers, and also supporting tenants with oil heated homes to move to energy efficient, green energy.
- 2.1.2 It is proposed to undertake further work on potential projects and bring a report back to Cabinet with costed proposals. It may also be appropriate to allocate budget for pipeline projects and to delegate authority for oversight of spend to relevant Portfolio Holder/s.

- 2.1.3 In the interim it is proposed to delegate authority to the Portfolio Holder – Strategy, Performance & Finance after consultation with the S151 Officer and the relevant Portfolio Holder for any urgent allocations for individual projects.

3.0 Implications

In writing this report and in putting forward recommendations officers have considered the following implications; Data Protection, Digital and Cyber Security, Equality and Diversity, Financial, Human Resources, Human Rights, Legal, Safeguarding, Sustainability, and Crime and Disorder and where appropriate they have made reference to these implications and added suitable expert comment where appropriate.

Financial Implications (FIN22-23/6034)

- 3.1 In order to fund the proposals outlined above £100,000 may be allocated from the General Funds corporate contingencies annual budget allocation towards any of the projects that are General Fund related. A decision at project level will be determined as to which fund the projects will be charged to.
- 3.2 The £50,000 allocation from the HRA may be funded from the in-year efficiencies that were identified from the re-integration of the housing service from Newark and Sherwood Homes that are yet to be allocated.
- 3.3 As these two allocations are due to be funded from in-year budget allocations rather than reserves, where there are funds remaining at 31 March 2023, the remaining balance may be transferred into reserves in order to be utilised during the 2023/24 financial year.

Background Papers and Published Documents

None