



Report to: Cabinet Meeting - 20 February 2024

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Paul Peacock, Strategy, Performance & Finance

Director Lead: John Robinson, Chief Executive

Lead Officer: Cara Clarkson, Business Manager – Regeneration & Housing Strategy, Ext. 5923

Report Summary	
Type of Report	Open Report, Key Decision
Report Title	Update on the Council’s Response to the Cost of Living Crisis
Purpose of Report	To provide an update on the delivery of proposals to assist tenants and residents, local businesses and employees with the rise in the cost of living, including proposals for activity in 2024/25.
Recommendations	It is recommended that Cabinet: a) Subject to approval by Full Council of the Revenue Budget for 2024-25, allocates the budget proposed for 2024/25 over the activities as described in the tables in Section 2 of the report; and b) Notes and endorses an additional £18,830 budget to be added to the 2025/26 financial year Revenue Budget to cover the shortfall in funding necessary.
Alternative Options Considered	Alternative options include not providing a cost-of-living response however this has not been considered viable given the pressures faced by residents, staff and business.
Reason for Recommendations	To support tenants, residents, businesses and employees with the ongoing cost of living challenges.

1.0 Background

- 1.1 On 6 December 2022, Cabinet established the first specific and targeted ‘Cost-of- Living’ budget at £150,000 (funded £100,000 from the General Fund and £50,000 from the Housing Revenue Account) to develop the Council’s response to the cost-of-living crisis.
- 1.2 Cabinet has received regular updates on the delivery of actions within the cost-of-living action plan, funded by this budget in February and October 2023.
- 1.3 This report sets out the activity under the cost-of-living action plan proposed for 2024/25, identifying where this activity will be contained within existing budgets and where additional budget is required.

2.0 Proposed Actions Under the Cost-of- Living Action Plan 2024/25

Support for Businesses

Action	Budget Requirement 2024/25
Continue to signpost businesses to support and grants via our website	Contained within existing budget
Continue to identify and provide Business Rate Relief where applicable under the small business rates relief scheme and the retail rates relief scheme.	Contained within existing budget
Continue with the 'Shop Local' campaign – following initial investment this project is currently running without the need for additional budget. Promotion of 'Shop Local' will continue to run through existing marketing channels.	Contained within existing budget
<p>New: Market Traders Start Up Grant</p> <p>As part of the COL support to residents and businesses it is proposed to work with Newark and Southwell Town Council to develop a small grant programme that works with potential new market traders to open a stall on a local market with a 50% rent reduction for up to 12 weeks.</p> <p>The programme will work with market operators to complement existing traders with new services and offers.</p>	£15,000
<p>New: Town Centre Gift Card</p> <p>It is proposed to create a town centre gift card that aims to support local independent retailers to promote local trade and increase local spend. Opportunity to sign up to the gift card would be made available to all independent retailers in Newark in the first instance with a view to rolling the scheme out further if successful.</p>	£15,000

Support for Residents

Action	Budget Requirement 2024/25
The council will continue the 'No Eviction Pledge', pledging that the council will not pursue eviction whilst the tenant(s) are engaging with us and working with us to reduce their debt, supporting people to remain in their home.	Contained within existing budget
The housing team will continue our 'Getting to Know You' visits, involving a conversation about a new tenant(s) situation and providing an opportunity to signpost for support where appropriate.	Contained within existing budget
We will continue to proactively encourage residents to claim Council Tax Support if they are eligible and we will assess claims within 18 days ensuring that residents get the financial support they need.	Contained within existing budget

We will increase our promotion of council tax support by linking to existing communications to all residents e.g. promoting the support available with all council tax bills.	
We will continue to support the local food clubs and 'Bread and Butter Thing' across the district.	Contained within existing budget.
We will continue with our 'Rent Free Week' for a further year as contained within the HRA budget directly.	Contained within existing budget
We will introduce a 'Home Release Scheme' incentivising those council tenants who are under occupying their homes to downsize – freeing up larger family homes and allowing households to live in a home suitable for their needs without incurring additional costs e.g. the 'bedroom tax' and heating a home larger than necessary.	£10,000 (HRA specific funding)
We will introduce a food coordinator role on a two-year fixed term contract. The food coordinator will: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oversee the "Feeding Newark and Sherwood" network. • Deliver the council's action plan linked to Nottinghamshire's Food Charter. • Address food insecurity across the district. • Combat food waste. 	(one FTE at grade NS8)
We will extend the support to families in need through an extension of the clothing voucher scheme introduced in 2023. All local primary schools will be invited to make vouchers available to families to purchase school uniforms during July and August.	£10,000
We will extend the offer of household and hygiene packs through the food clubs, noting that these provided immediate relief to households in 2023 providing basic cleaning products, washing powder, shampoo, shower gel and toothpastes.	£10,000
Low-Cost Healthy Food Project – supporting low cost and healthy cooking courses in targeted areas including but not limited to Clipstone, Hawtonville, Yorke Drive, Ollerton, Blidworth and Bilsthorpe. Each course runs for ten people for six weeks. £15,000 would support 250 individuals to undertake a course across the district.	£15,000
Energy vouchers (to be made available in Winter 2024). Working with Sherwood & Newark Citizens Advice to deliver fuel vouchers on our behalf as part of their existing fuel bank scheme. This would be the cost of the vouchers and maximum of 10% admin fee. Vouchers will be allocated through Citizens Advice following an assessment of need.	£20,000

Support for Colleagues - Support to staff by offering:

Action	Budget Requirement 2024/25
Free parking for two years	Contained within existing budget
£10 Leisure Centre Membership at our Active4Today Leisure Centres	Contained within existing budget

20% off Microsoft and discounted Virgin Media Broadband and TV	Contained within existing budget
Credit Union Payroll Scheme	No cost to council
Discreet Counselling and Support	Contained within existing budget
Free eye test and discount on specs for regular Visual Display Users	Contained within existing budget
Introduction of VIVUP benefits scheme offering a range of discounts to members in 2023	Contained within existing budget

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 FIN(23-24/8887)

- 3.1 Within the proposed budget report for 2024/25 (elsewhere on this agenda), £150,000 has been budgeted for to assist with the Council's response to the cost of living crisis. The proposals described in the tables above total £178,830 (subject to pay awards for the proposed food coordinator post). £10,000 of the above is relevant directly to the HRA and can be accommodated within the existing cost of living support budget already identified within the HRA.
- 3.2 The remaining £168,830 would therefore mean a shortfall in funding, against the proposed budget, of £18,830 should Members approve all of the initiatives proposed. As the food coordinator post is a two-year fixed term appointment, this additional budget would need to be approved to be added into the 2025/26 financial year in order to meet the currently funding shortfall.

Background Papers and Published Documents

Except for previously published documents, which will be available elsewhere, the documents listed here will be available for inspection in accordance with Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972.

Cost of Living report to Cabinet, 06/12/2022

Cost of Living report to Cabinet, 21/02/2023

Cost of Living report to Cabinet, 31/10/2022