

Adults and Health Committee

Date of Meeting:	23 rd January 2023
Report Title:	Notice of Motion: Cost of Living Plan
Report of:	Helen Charlesworth-May Executive Director – Adults, Health and Integration
Report Reference No:	AH/39/2022-23
Ward(s) Affected:	All Wards

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1. This report is requesting that Adults and Health Committee discuss the Notice of Motion (Appendix 1) that was proposed to Full Council on the 19th October 2022 by Cllr J Clowes and Seconded by Cllr T Dean
- 1.2. This report also provides Adults and Health Committee members with an update regarding the Council’s approach to the Cost-of-Living Crisis and the interventions that are underway at the time of writing this report (21st December 2022). A further report around impact of interventions will be presented back to Committee at later date.
- 1.3. The content within this report demonstrates the following strategic priorities:
 - A council which empowers and cares about people

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1. To date, officers have been working cross departmentally to have a greater understanding of the impact of the cost-of-living crisis, on local residents and businesses, on the Council’s financial resilience and the impact it is having on staff and their personal resilience and the impact on recruitment and retention. Council officers have been working hard to understand the impact that the cost-of-living crisis is having and set the objective “to

minimise the impact that the cost of living (CoL) crisis has on residents, business and the Council's financial position to ensure we can continue to deliver essential services". We have based our approach on increasing our reach and offer within the resources that are available to the Council aiming to minimise further impact to the Council's financial situation. The interventions that the Council has put into place are being regularly reviewed to assess impact by an internal cost of living steering group that meets bi-weekly and chaired by the Head of Service for Communities and Integration. The work done by the Council to date has been to reflect this objective with the resources we have available.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1.** Adults and Health Committee to make a decision to accept or reject the Notice of Motion (in full or in part) that was proposed to Full Council on the 19th October 2022 by Cllr J Clowes and Seconded by Cllr T Dean and subsequently referred to Adults and Health Committee
- 3.2.** Whilst considering this Notice of Motion, acknowledge the work done to date by officers on the cost of living crisis, which includes the approach taken (Para 6.6), how we have increased our reach (Para 6.7), how we are monitoring the immediate increase in need (Para 6.8), the interventions we have introduced (Para 6.9) and how we are the monitoring the impact the cost of living crisis is having going forward (Para 6.10).

4. Reasons for Recommendations

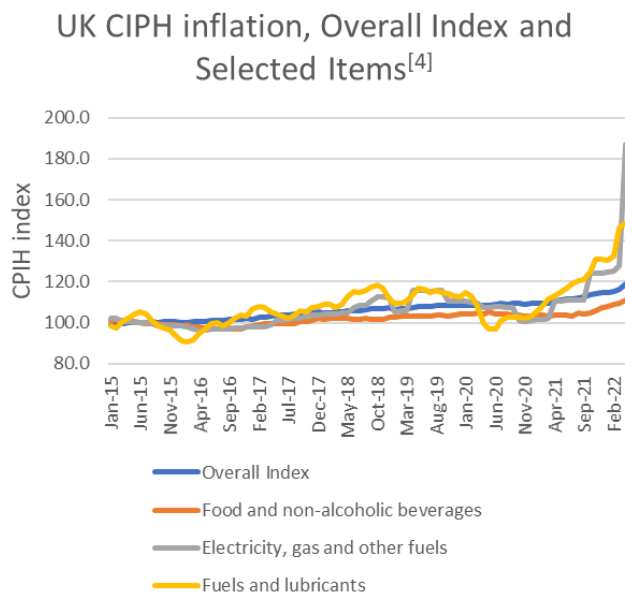
- 4.1.** Adults and Health Committee have an obligation to accept (in full or in part) or reject the Notice of Motion.
- 4.2.** Council officers have been working hard to understand the impact that the cost-of-living crisis is having and set the objective to "*To minimise the impact the cost of living (CoL) crisis has on residents, business and the Council's financial position to ensure we can continue to deliver essential services*". The work done by the Council to date has been to reflect this objective with the resources we have available.
- 4.3.** The content of this report contributes to the following strategic aims of the Council's Corporate Plan 2021-25:
 - 'Reduce health inequalities across the borough' by working with partners to address issues associated with poverty.
 - 'A Collaborative way of working with partners to support communities to achieve their full potential'. Working in partnership with community- based providers to inspire confidence and develop resilience.

5. Other Options Considered

Option	Impact	Risk
Do nothing	Increase in poverty More individuals accessing health and social care provision	Reputational and not adhering to the corporate plan strategic aims.

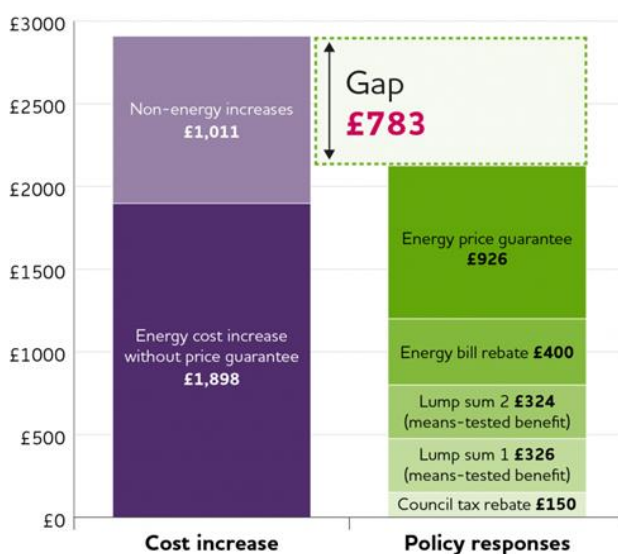
6. Background

- 6.1. The cost-of-living crisis is having significant impacts nationally and we anticipate seeing increasing financial pressure on resident's, local businesses and community organisation's in Cheshire East.
- 6.2. There are a number of reasons for the cost-of-living crisis, but the steep rise of inflation for key goods is where stakeholders are experiencing the biggest impact. The chart below provides a visual around inflation rates for key areas (food and fuel) over the last 7 years.



- 6.3. Analysis by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation shows the growing gap in the cost of living.

Comparing increases in the cost of living for low-income families between 2021/22 and 2022/23 with Government policy support



Source:
JRF analysis using Cornwall Insight
price cap forecast, 8 September 2022

JRF JOSEPH
ROUNTREE
FOUNDATION

6.4. On the 19th October 2022 the Leader announced at Full Council that:

- the Council was planning for increased demand for services to support residents who were experiencing financial stress, including the established support, such as the household support fund, emergency assistance, housing benefit and council tax support. The Council would continue to provide essential food and fuel vouchers.
- the Council would be launching a Warm Places scheme to provide spaces where people could go, free of charge, to spend time to keep warm if they were struggling to heat or keep their homes warm.
- the Council was facing extreme financial pressures due to rising energy prices, high inflation rate and increased costs to deliver and commission essential services. The Council would be joining with other councils to call on the government to provide funding so that it could ensure that the most vulnerable were supported and aware of the help available to them.

6.5. At Full Council meeting a Notice of Motion (*Appendix 1 Notice of Motion 19th October 2022*) - was proposed which was subsequently referred to Adults and Health Committee (Minute 45 Notices of Motion -Paragraph 5 Cost of Living)

COST OF LIVING

Proposed by Councillor J Clowes and Seconded by Councillor T Dean

We propose that:

Cheshire East Council is determined to ensure the protection of the residents of Cheshire East from the cost-of-living challenge driven by Covid and Vladimir Putin's war in Ukraine.

These combined effects have led to rising energy prices and our residents facing significant cost of living pressures.

This council is cognisant of the significant work that the Government has done to support the residents of Cheshire East. It notes the benefit that the two-year energy price guarantee and the certainty it will give to residents across Cheshire East as well as the enormous help that the £400 energy bill discount will provide to every household. It further notes the additional support of the £650 cost of living payment for those in receipt of means-tested benefits, £300 for pensioner households and £150 for recipients of disability benefits in Cheshire East.

Cheshire East Council thanks the Government for providing equivalent support for those not on the mains energy grid and the protection of jobs in Cheshire East that the six-month protection for businesses will provide.

Cheshire East Council further welcomes the Government's longer-term plans that will maximise domestic energy produced through North Sea oil and gas, as well as nuclear energy and renewables that will contribute towards securing energy independence in the long term and ensure that Cheshire East will never be subject to energy price hikes caused by illegal wars again.

Cheshire East Council therefore resolves to:

- 1. Work with the Government to ensure that it delivers the much-appreciated support to the residents of Cheshire East as quickly as possible.*
- 2. Proactively identify those most in need of support in Cheshire East and ensure that they access all the Government support for which they are eligible.*
- 3. Identify further local opportunities in Cheshire East for energy generation to help increase the supply of energy to further aid the long-term lowering of prices, support the Government's aim of domestic energy security and create local jobs.*

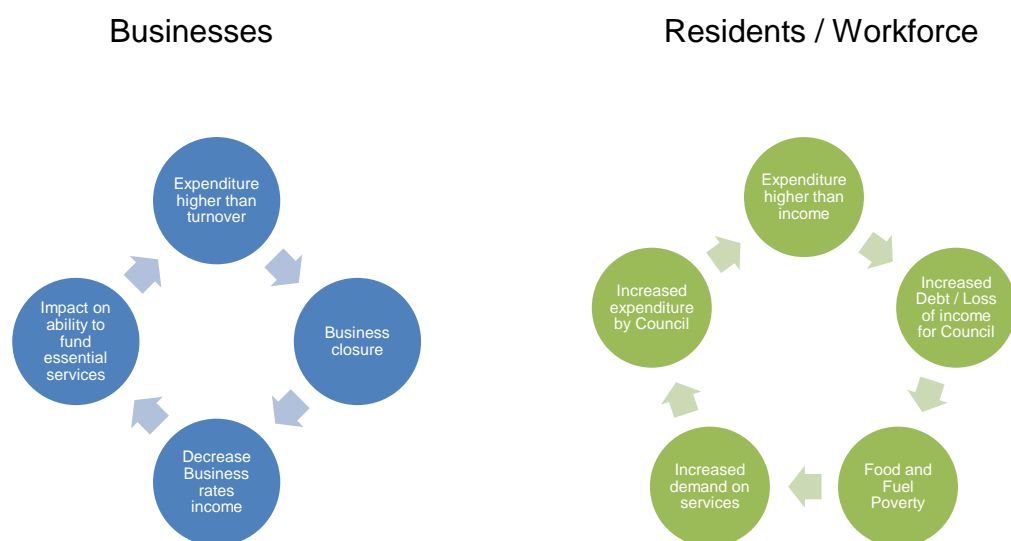
The following work was already underway irrespective of this Notice of Motion.

6.6. Our approach

Our objective

To minimise the impact that the cost of living (CoL) crisis has on residents, business and the Council's financial position to ensure we can continue to deliver essential services

High level impact



Our approach with partners

We will work with partners to ensure national and local resources are available and utilised. Ensuring partners share any proposals and decisions are considered to prevent escalating problems and financial consequences for individuals and the Council, e.g., a family not paying rent, if evicted, will require homelessness provision, potentially social care interventions and affect educational outcomes.

We have strong networks and relationships with partners including VCFSE, the LEP, Strategic Housing Group, Rural Strategy Group, NHS, Cheshire East Business Forum, and Cheshire Association of Local Councils (ChALC).

6.7. Increasing our reach

The Council has a range of provision already in place to support residents to address the CoL Crisis, including the Holiday Activity Fund, Household Support Fund, Emergency Assistance Scheme, Home improvement grants and Discretionary Housing Payments.

To ensure we are clear and concise with provision and expand our reach we will have our:

- Digital offer – all available resources online: <https://www.cheshireeast.gov.uk/costofliving> we also share this with key stakeholders to disseminate e.g. School bulletins, printed materials for handing out by partners, slides for waiting rooms in GP surgeries.
- Face to Face – Over 60 Venues (libraries, Connected Communities Centres) are currently being invited to become Warm PlaCEs
- Telephone – on the 31st October we created a dedicated phone line so that people can find out what they are eligible for - 0300 123 5024
- In our communities - The Stay Well Squad will be undertaking Winter Wellbeing visits to provide winter wellbeing items to vulnerable residents.

Targeting existing resource

We will support the Council's workforce to access available support to ensure they remain resilient, so that the Council can continue to meet existing and increasing demand.

We will provide money advice, hints and tips and target available resources to residents and businesses.

Services from the public and VCFSE sector will be targeted to the most vulnerable to reduce demand on statutory services.

We will be seeking to increase available homelessness provision and prevention work.

It will be important that we monitor this situation and the associated risks on the Council.

6.8. Local significant insights on increasing need

- Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) funding is received from the Department of Work and Pensions each year to assist those struggling to pay their rent where their housing costs are not fully met by Housing Benefit or Universal Credit. This has reduced and yet demand has increased and the budget for this year is almost exhausted. Help for those most in need has been topped up with a £50k allocation from the Household Support Fund.

Funding:

2019/20	£457,711
2020/21	£614,359
2021/22	£491,933
2022/23	£348,661

As at 30 November we have a balance of £13,735.76 of the core DHP funding left.

- Free school meals data showing increase over the last couple of years:
As at 30/11/2022 Total children 9,670 from 5,450 households
As at 30/04/2021 Total children 8,323 from 4,627 households

- Emergency Assistance [Emergency Assistance \(cheshireeast.gov.uk\)](https://www.cheshireeast.gov.uk)

The funding has remained at £220k per year but demand this year has increased and applications allowed, meeting the criteria, is exceeding the budget and is on target for £300k.

2019/20	Claims received	1,296	Claims allowed	646
2020/21	Claims received	1,284	Claims allowed	686
2021/22	Claims received	1,617	Claims allowed	995
2022/23	Claims received	1,649	Claims allowed	893 (as at 19/12/2022)

6.9. Interventions

1. We will be collating and sharing local public and voluntary sector provision to offer support with food, fuel, transport, digital poverty, and money advice, this will be accessible to staff, residents, partners and members via the Cheshire East website. There will be a dedicated phone line that people can call should they require support.
 - a) *Funding – existing staffing resource*
 - b) *Monitoring success – increased access to provision*
2. The Council will be jointly funding a food poverty coordinator with Cheshire Community Action. This post will provide support to the VCFSE Sector to ensure the delivery of this provision is efficient, accessible, streamlined and sustainable.
 - a) *Funding – reserved grant funding within communities*
 - b) *Monitoring success – clearer sustained offer that sustains provision and increased footfall*
3. We will be investing to increase our homelessness provision by procuring an additional 20 properties to provide a safety net for those who may become homeless
 - a) *Funding – this will be funded from the government funded resettlement schemes*
 - b) *Monitoring success – able to meet statutory obligations*
4. We will be providing additional homelessness prevention information and advice linking with Money/Debt Advice Support
 - a) *Funding – existing staffing resource*
 - b) *Monitoring success – increased access to provision*
5. We have invested in the Citizens Advice Bureau to roll out a “Home Energy Support Fund” which will allow people to donate their government funded “Winter Fuel Payments” to those who need it more
 - a) *Funding – this will be funded from existing Communities Grants budget*
 - b) *Monitoring success – number of donated payments and number of allocated payments to those who need it*
6. We have set up over 60 Warm Places which have been providing information and advice, warm drinks and hot food. We will ensure in each Care Community we have at least 2 Warm Places that serve free food and an additional 4 Warm Places that serve hot drinks. We will also ensure we have good geographical spread across urban and rural areas. In addition to this will be encouraging and publicising any info.

- a) *Funding – this will be funded from existing Connected Communities Centre monies*
 - b) *Monitoring success – vulnerable people accessing available resources*
- 7. We will be providing a “Cost-of-Living Payment” of £100 per month to Sponsors who are housing Ukrainian guests during the months of Nov, Dec, Jan and Feb to help with additional utility costs they are having due to guests living within their properties. In addition to this we will be offering every Sponsor that is willing to provide their guest with accommodation beyond the required 6 months, with an additional £100 each month (months 7-12).
 - a) *Funding – this will be funded from the government funded resettlement schemes*
 - b) *Monitoring success – reduction in homelessness of this cohort*
- 8. A review of the Household Support Fund has improved accessibility for the local residents and reduced strain on other support grants, such as emergency assistance’ this has resulted in higher uptake for adults.
 - a) *Funding – this will be funded from the government Department for Work and Pensions*
 - b) *Monitoring success – Access to these funds for the most vulnerable families and elderly.*
- 9. Stock of Winter Wellbeing items to support those who are vulnerable being purchased and distributed. This will be targeted including providing items to those coming out of hospital who are high risk of cold homes/mobility issues.
 - a) *Funding – this will be funded from public health monies*
 - b) *Monitoring success – number of items provided to vulnerable cohorts*

Two further interventions that have yet to be approved but under developments

- 10. UK Shared Prosperity Fund – This £200,000 “Cost of Living Community Response Grant” for the VCFSE sector to respond to local needs.
 - a) *Funding – this will be funded from the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities*
 - b) *Monitoring success – grants provided and impact those grants make*
- 11. Rural Community Transport Fund – A £200,000 grant which encourages the VCFSE sector to apply to implement a community transport scheme that can get vulnerable people to services including warm places, appointments, out of hospital in a safe and timely manner.
 - a) *Funding – this will be funded from the government funded resettlement schemes*

b) Monitoring success – grants provided and impact those grants make

6.10. Monitoring the impact of cost-of-living crisis

As a Council we already have population data and information on the reach of services such as:

- Those in receipt of Social Care
- Homelessness data
- Council Tax Support
- Housing Benefit
- Residents that seek CAB support for Money Advice
- Resident seeking support through Emergency Assistance Scheme
- Benefit related free school meals, early years pupil premium, 2-year-old funding, care leavers, young carers, not in education and employment or training 16-18
- Business data
- Energy Efficiency data
- Poverty JSNA

We will use exiting data and to ensure we have good oversight of those most vulnerable to enable us to target our current and future support.

6.11. Cheshire East for energy generation

Energy Generation is a key part of the Council commitment to reduce and offset carbon. Our facilities teams are currently working on 19 solar installations on Council buildings which will generate renewable energy and allow the council to switch to electric air source heat pumps, reducing gas use across the authority. A key part of the Council's offset (of Carbon we cannot reduce by 2025) is the construction of two solar farms which will generate additional sustainable energy. The first of which is due to begin construction in the new year is to power the Council's composting plant at Leighton Garage Crewe. Feasibility on further solar schemes is currently underway, with the opportunity for the Council to increase generation beyond that currently required for the Council's own offset in the coming years which could contribute to the Council's carbon neutral target.

7. Consultation and Engagement

7.1. We are also considering the 12 recommendations from the People's Panel as part of any future interventions the Peoples Panel over two weekends had discussions with local residents from various communities around the implications of cost of living and how the Council could support vulnerable cohorts, these recommendations are currently in the process of approved.

8. Implications

8.1. Legal

8.1.1. There does not appear to be any substantive legal implications arising from the notice of motion referred to above, however, it should be noted

that the Care Act 2014 requires local authorities to promote wellbeing when carrying out any of their care and support functions and to provide a range of preventative services in the exercise of its functions.

8.2. Finance

8.2.1.1. The strategies and interventions described above are affordable. The expenditure for the specific activities has been appraised in terms of value for money and affordability in previous reports. The two interventions which are still at proposal stage are also affordable and amount to activity appropriate to the specific grant funds cited.

8.2.1.2. Interventions 1 & 4 refer to re-directing existing staff time. It's understood that rather than creating new burdens, staff will be re-focused on to the specific activities described above.

8.3. Policy

8.3.1. There are no Policy Implications identified to date.

8.4. Equality

8.4.1. No equality impact assessment is required for this report but each intervention would be subject to its own EIA.

8.5. Human Resources

8.5.1. The interventions to date have relied on existing council resources.

8.6. Risk Management

8.6.1. The risks around the cost-of-living crisis are being monitored, the interventions aim to provide highest impact with the resource we have available to reduce the risks around cost-of-living impacts.

8.7. Rural Communities

8.7.1. The rural action plan is taken into consideration in each intervention implemented.

8.8. Children and Young People/Cared for Children

8.8.1. Children and young people are informed of the relevant interventions through forums such as school bulletins.

8.9. Public Health

8.9.1. Public health advice is sought when implementing interventions and have recently published a Joint Strategic Needs Assessment on Poverty to indicate where we can target our interventions to the cohorts most affected by the cost-of-living crisis.

8.9.2. Prevalent socioeconomic conditions have a profound effect on the health and wellbeing of our residents. Wealth and health are two sides of the same coin and as a result long term disruption to incomes will have

ramifications for both physical health and emotional health and wellbeing. Actions taken to mitigate the most severe impacts will help to reduce the long-term health implications.

8.10. Climate Change

8.10.1. Energy Efficiency is one element of supporting people to reduce energy consumption/costs.

Access to Information	
Contact Officer:	Dan Coyne, Head of Communities and Integration Daniel.coyne@cheshireeast.gov.uk 07816144062
Appendices:	Appendix 1 - Notice of Motion 19th October (Para 6, page 6 and 7)
Background Papers:	Council - Wednesday, 19th October, 2022 11.00 am