

**REPORT TO
HEALTH & WELLBEING BOARD**

21st SEPTEMBER 2022

COST OF LIVING CRISIS

SUMMARY

This report provides an update to the Health and Wellbeing Board on the actions being taken by the Council to help mitigate the impact of the cost of living crisis on the borough's residents. Board members are asked to note that this paper provides an 'as of now' position and work to identify and implement further actions/support will be ongoing, including on-going collaborations with both our statutory and VCSE partners.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This report is for information only.

However, Board members are asked to consider whether:

1. As detailed in paragraph 6 they can provide any match funding to support the delivery of a boroughs network of Warm Spaces.
2. To share details (as noted in paragraph 9) of any support services they which to include in the new Councils 'Cost of Living Support' web hub.

BACKGROUND

1. In 2021, the Council adopted *The Fairer Stockton-on-Tees Framework – A strategic framework for tackling inequalities* in the Borough. This document details the Councils call to action and outlines our approach over the next 10-years to address the impact of inequalities in our borough. Whilst we will continue to develop our approach to tackling inequality in the borough, the current cost of living crisis (significantly rising energy, food, and fuel prices) requires that we take immediate action.
2. Whilst examples of new actions are detailed within the body of this report, Board members are also asked to note that the Council has established services to support those in need / are experiencing poverty. Examples of support currently being delivered to support our residents includes:
 - Council Tax Rebates and Discretionary payments made to residents.
 - Delivery of two rounds of the Household Support Grant which provides payments to those households qualifying for Free School and energy support payments through Back-on-Track have been delivered.
 - Energy saving schemes and advice services delivered (including the Warm Home Healthy People Programme).
 - Holiday Activities Fund and Frees School meals initiatives.

- Welfare Assistance Programmes ‘Back on Track’ (crisis support and settlement support).
- Household Health Checks.
- Employment and training support through the Wellington Square Hub.
- Family Hubs.

AND

- VCSE collaborations, for example joint working with Catalyst (Food Power Network), SDAIS and Moneywise (credit union) etc.
3. Whilst the main causes of the current cost of living crisis are outside of the Council’s control, we do recognise that we have a vital role to play in both identifying and delivering ways we can help to mitigate the negative impact the current situation will have on our residents. Key to our approach will be continued collaborative working with our valued partners. Examples of existing partnerships include:
- The Infinity Partnership
 - Health & Wellbeing Board/Partnership
 - The Housing, Neighbourhood & Affordable Warmth Partnership
 - Community Partnerships
 - Voluntary & Community Sector – Catalyst
4. By way of a recent example the Housing, Neighbourhoods and Affordable Warmth Partnership and SDAIS have recently held a joint event to consider the issue of fuel poverty and discuss what can be done about it at a local, regional, and national level.

NEW/CURRENT ACTIONS

Warm Spaces

5. As the cost-of living crisis escalates, the Council and its partners (including Catalyst and Registered Housing Providers) are pulling together a directory of ‘warm spaces’ - venues where residents who are struggling financially can go (without stigma) to keep warm, avoid social isolation, and stay well over the winter months.
6. Contact has been made with a variety of groups and organisations to ask whether they will consider including their buildings as ‘warm spaces’ and to sign-up to our warm space campaign to support residents of the Borough during the winter months. Warm Spaces will run from the beginning of October 2022 until the end of March 2023. To support VCSE/community organisations, grants of between £50 and £500 will be available (from the end of September 2022) to support such services. An initial £5k has been secured from SBC Public Health, however further funds will be needed, and alternative funding options are currently being explored. *Board members are asked to consider whether they can provide any match funding to support this local initiative.*
7. Our goal is to grow and communicate a directory of warm places across the borough (public, private, health and voluntary venues) and to ensure this information is clearly marketed so everyone who is feeling the cold knows where they can go to get warm, stay warm and enjoy a little company and perhaps some hot refreshments. At the time of writing this report 45 venues have been identified.

8. Once Warm Spaces are up and running, our intention (working with wider council services and both statutory & VCSE partners) is to develop the 'warm spaces offers' and bring other support services into these venues to ensure residents have access at a local level.

Cost of living - Online hub

9. The Council's website has been updated to ensure residents have easy access to services which they may require. This new, central 'hub' is on the landing page of Councils website and is titled '*Cost of Living Support*'.



10. Currently this hub lists Council support services and provides linkages to wider Government support webpages. This central hub will continue to be updated to include services offered by partners. *Should Board members be aware of other support/services that would be useful to include in this central hub they are asked to email fsot@stockton.gov.uk (providing details of the services to be included and a weblink).*

Resident communication

11. To ensure that our residents are aware of the support available from the Council a variety of communication methods will be used to promote and encourage residents to access support services.

Lobbying

12. In addition to direct support to residents, the Council also has vital role to play in lobbying and will continue to do this at a local, sub-regional and national level.

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