

Cost of Living – Herefordshire Response

Health and Wellbeing Board

26th September 2022

Background

The rising costs of energy, food and other essentials are combining with existing disadvantage and vulnerability within our communities to put many households at greater risk of both immediate hardship and reduced opportunity and wellbeing.

With our partners, Herefordshire Council will continue to do what we can to protect people against higher costs, targeting help at those facing the most complex challenges

Impact

Added to these pressures, cost of living increases will impact on health and social care services in many ways, such as:

Patients: Downward pressure on incomes is expected to be greater than ever and there is already well-documented evidence to show the link between deprivation and poorer health outcomes across physical and mental health conditions. For example:

- Poor home heating properly over winter leading to exacerbated health conditions, particularly for older people.
- Impact on people's mental health and likelihood of cost pressures leading to poor dietary habits.
- There is likely to be less take up of co-paid health services such as prescriptions, optometry and dental services

Recommendations

1. Continue to promote the range of ways in which the council and its partners supports residents in need, particularly through Talk Community and Money on your Mind.
2. Ensure that specific support is in place for those for whom Herefordshire Council is a corporate parent.
3. Establish a Cost of Living Commission to gather information and identify other actions that the council and its partners can take to support residents.
4. Develop a longer term strategy for working with the voluntary and community sector, building on the foundations established over the last two years.

Current Support

Ongoing – advice and support

- Talk Community funded development of **community money management and debt advice** provision at a local level across all of the market towns and augmented by CAB outreach
- Network of **over 60 Talk Community Hubs** across the county supporting local residents and providing signposting to services with many also offering affordable / free activities
- **Talk Community Money on Your Mind website** – provides information on local and national support available to those who are struggling with money or debt problems
- A **generous Council Tax Reduction Scheme** to assist people on a low income with their Council Tax bill. The amount of reduction depends on individual circumstances but is designed to benefit those on a low income whether from benefits, low-paid work or self-employed work, those with no than £6,000 in savings and capital, and those on Universal Credit.
- The **Council Tax Discretionary Hardship Policy** offers eligible residents short term assistance, up to a maximum of six months, towards the cost of their council tax due to exception and temporary hardship.
- **Free school meals** - all primary school children in Reception year, Year 1 and Year 2 in Herefordshire are entitled to school meals.
- **Herefordshire Community Foundation** has worked collaboratively to support grants programmes targeting those most in need,
- **Home energy efficiency** – advice on how to save energy in the home and access to energy efficiency grants.
- **Emergency Welfare Provision** service for those who are at crisis point.
- Advice and support for households who are **homeless or at risk of homelessness**.

One-off funding and Developing initiatives

- **Household Support Fund** – majority used to support families and pensioners on local incomes with essential bills.
- **Discretionary Fund of Energy Rebate Scheme** –identification of households to benefit from discretionary element (£481,350) of the Energy Rebate Scheme.
- **More than £1million** spent on Covid 19 Recovery Grants for activities and services to encourage residents to increase physical activity and socialisation has been delivered free to participants
- **Mental Health** Provided funding for mental health and wellbeing support including Qwell (free, on line safe and anonymous mental wellbeing support for adults); free training in mental health awareness and Mental Health First Aid to community organisations; funding for a community mental health co-ordinator employed by Mind to encourage a network of community organisations supporting mental health for local people
- **Holiday Activities and Food Programme** provides support for families on low incomes during main school holidays with over 1000 children taking part in the activities during the summer and 30 providers delivering the offer, funding provided for three years.

In development

- Scoping and developing **warm hubs across the county** by utilising the libraries and archive building as well as Talk Community hubs.
- Scoping a '**community chest**' fund for charities by working with Community Foundation to identify businesses who may wish to donate money into a fund that will be distributed to community organisations that supports the wellbeing of residents.

Next Steps

- Bring together a range of partners to look at how to support residents further by holding a summit in early October.
- Gather information from identified groups and cohorts on the challenges they are facing and the ideas that they have, across the county (urban and rural) to understand better the impact of the crisis on their day to day lives. This could be run on a Ward/Primary Care Network basis with Ward Councillors leading/promoting it in their wards.
- Run a series of bespoke events in each of the Community Hubs during October and November offering personalised advice to individuals. The events to be run jointly with other partners, such as housing associations.
- Develop and run a Herefordshire-wide communications and engagement campaign from mid-September promoting the help that the council and others can provide, including creating a specific page on the council website with links to all available support options and encouraging all partners to link to it.
- Explore the feasibility of setting up a community lottery in Herefordshire which will raise money specifically for good causes in the county.
- Gather the themes emerging from Community Hubs work into an initial position statement and where appropriate, make recommendations for the Cabinet and other partners in January 2023.
- Hold a further summit in July 2023 to review actions and identify further work required, shaped around the longer term issues of debt, mental health, economy and housing.

Any other opportunities/risks?

- Impact on staff, how as a system are we supporting our workforce?
- Five health inequality work streams in collaboration with VCSE and through the Community Partnership