

Report of	Meeting	Date
Director of Communities (Introduced by Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member (Health and Wellbeing))	Cabinet	16 November 2022

## Cost of Living Update

Is this report confidential?	No
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Is this decision key?	No
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### Purpose of the Report

1. To update Cabinet on work around Cost of Living to date and share the draft partnership action plan.
2. To seek approval for outline distribution of South Ribble's Household Support Fund Round 3 allocation for 2022.

### Recommendations

3. That Cabinet notes and supports work with partners to support residents through the Cost of Living Crisis.
4. That Cabinet approves distribution of South Ribble's Household Support Fund Round 3 allocation, with flexibility to ensure that resources can be targeted to areas of most need.

### Reasons for recommendations

5. Cabinet has given public commitment to supporting vulnerable residents and ensuring no child goes hungry in South Ribble. Commitment to a Cost of Living Action Plan is in line with this.
6. Through rounds 1 and 2 of Household Support Fund, the Council has provided funding directly into households for energy and essentials, improved the efficiency of people's homes, and invested in the charities and community groups who offer support day in, day out.

## Other options considered and rejected

7. Following on from the Cost of Living Conference, the Council could have worked on a response without partners. Given the enhanced understanding of the broad impact of the increasing cost of living from the conference, it was agreed that a partnership approach would have greater impact and reach more households.
8. In Household Support Fund allocation, districts across Lancashire have taken varied approaches, from supermarket vouchers to direct payments to households in receipt of benefits. While these approaches have been discussed, it is believed that a responsive approach to local need is preferable, with no restrictions for working households who may be on a low income.

## Corporate priorities

9. The report relates to the following corporate priorities:

<b>An exemplary council</b>	<b>Thriving communities</b>
<b>A fair local economy that works for everyone</b>	<b>Good homes, green spaces, healthy places</b>

## Background to the report

10. The Cost of Living Crisis has featured in national news headlines for several months, with increasing levels of anxiety reported around increasing utility bills, food prices going up and rising interest rates.
11. In August 2022, the Council hosted a Cost of Living Conference for frontline services. Attendees included representatives from CAB, DWP, social prescribing, churches, foodbanks, charities and community groups.
12. Feedback from this conference (attached at appendix A) gave significant insight into the issues affecting people locally. Although it was heartening to hear of the commitment to supporting people, it was also clear that in terms of impact, a rising cost of living could create pressure and vulnerability in households who have never struggled before.
13. Immediately after the conference, senior leaders from organisations including DWP, CAB, LFRS, Unify Credit Union and Progress Housing Group met with Cabinet to discuss, understand and agree a response to the issues raised. Collective commitment was given to a Cost of Living Working Group, with agreement that a partnership response would be the most effective way to reach as many households as possible.
14. Through the summer, Household Support Fund Round 2 has been distributed, with huge need for help with energy / utility payments. From an initial allocation of £340,000, demand outstripped supply - our partners at CAB who administer our energy vouchers quickly 'sold out' of £80,000 budget.
15. South Ribble bid for additional funding from the countywide contingency and received an additional £100,000. Initial plans were to split this between foodbanks and CAB energy vouchers, however foodbanks requested that all the funding was spent on

energy, as so many people presenting at foodbanks cited heating as their biggest concern.

16. Round 2 of the Household Support Fund has seen 2116 families, 1557 pensioners and 444 individuals receive help. We are grateful to community providers who have assisted people, including Key Unlocking Futures, The Base, The Place, Community Network and Outreach Service, Clare House, Barnardos and SLEAP.

## Proposals

17. The proposed Cost of Living Action Plan is attached at appendix B. This has been drawn up with partners from the working group and will remain a 'live' document, with content added as information becomes available. Initial themes which have been identified as priorities are:
  - Strengthened internal communication – between working group partners
  - Joined up external communication – working together on messages to residents
  - Practical and financial support – operational responses to the crisis
  - Health and wellbeing – helping people to stay well
18. It has been identified and agreed that Cost of Living support should evolve the South Ribble Together model. South Ribble Together was well received and valued during the pandemic, and offers the opportunity for partners large and small to be involved. Feedback tells us that the stigma of approaching the Council for help is reduced through South Ribble Together; other partners report the same.
19. With this in mind, one of the core projects contained in the action plan is to establish a South Ribble Together website, with information on a wide range of support options which are available for people to access. Staff from the Council's frontline services, as well as working group partner organisations and local community groups will be briefed to be able to help residents with accessing the site and making referrals.
20. Another of the projects within the plan is to build on the successful Holiday and Food (HAF) Programme, extending the offer into half term holidays. HAF has proved to be an excellent way to offer no-cost local activities to families, feed children who participate and provide pop up shops with free food to take away. This is now proposed to provide our Holiday Hunger offer, as take up rates have been so high. In summer 2022 alone, over 1300 children attended, giving South Ribble the second highest participation rate across Lancashire.
21. The action plan also contains a commitment to running school uniform banks throughout the year, again based on the success this summer. Across this and supporting the Tippytoes Winter Warmer scheme, over 700 families were provided (at least 1400 children) were provided with school uniform, PE kits, coats and blankets. Going forward, it is proposed to run school uniform banks as part of the HAF programme around the borough.
22. Household Support Fund Round 3 allocations have now been confirmed, with £340,000 awarded to South Ribble. It is anticipated that this funding will be received in November, with a spend deadline of 31 March 2023.
23. The Council has successfully distributed funding through rounds 1 and 2 with investment in energy provision (vouchers for gas, electricity and water), home energy efficiency

adaptations (e.g. loft insulation, replacement boilers, etc) and also funds to local charities and groups such as foodbanks and community centres.

24. Following consultation with partners around current and pending demand for support services, and the model applied in previous rounds, a two-phase approach is proposed with allocation of phase 2 dependent on demand in phase 1.

25.

	<b>Goods / service</b>	<b>Provider</b>	<b>Amount</b>
<b>Phase 1</b>	Utility support	CAB	£ 50,000
	Energy - home adaptations	SRBC	£ 100,000
	Food & hygiene	Leyland Foodbank	£ 5,000
	Food & hygiene	Bamber Bridge Foodbank	£ 5,000
	Food & hygiene	Penwortham Foodbank	£ 5,000
	Food & hygiene	New Day Foodbank	£ 5,000
	Food & hygiene	The Place	£ 5,000
	Food & hygiene	The Base	£ 5,000
	Food & hygiene	CNOS	£ 5,000
	Food & hygiene	Refuge	£ 5,000
	Food & hygiene	Tippytoes	£ 5,000
	Food & hygiene	Barnardos	£ 5,000
	Food & hygiene	Key Unlocking Futures	£ 5,000
	Food & hygiene	SLEAP	£ 5,000
	Food & hygiene	Homestart	£ 5,000
	Wider essentials	Step up grants (SRBC)	£ 20,000
<b>Phase 2 - proposed</b>	Utility support	CAB	£ 30,000
	Wider essentials	Step up grants (SRBC)	£ 15,000
	Energy - home adaptations	SRBC	£ 30,000
	Contingency	SRBC	£ 13,000
	Admin fee @ 5%	SRBC	£ 17,000
			<b>£ 340,000</b>

### **Climate change and air quality**

26. The work noted in this report contains a number of initiatives which support Council's Green Agenda:

- Replacing items such as windows and boilers with more energy efficient models.
- Use of CAB to offer energy advice and support with fuel vouchers.
- Step up grants to update to improve homes and make them warmer.
- Foodbank Network project to encourage energy efficient preparation of nutritious meals.
- #warmwelcome approach to community spaces being heated for shared use.

## **Equality and diversity**

27. There are no negative equality impacts arising from the Cost of Living Action Plan or Household Support Fund on any of the protected groups. There are positive impacts on age, disability and maternity as financial support given through the fund seeks to reduce vulnerability.

## **Risk**

28. There is a risk of not responding to the Cost of Living Crisis, and households becoming vulnerable as a consequence. The proactive partnership response in South Ribble will hopefully mitigate against this, and encourage those who are struggling to access the help that they need before reaching crisis.
29. There is a reputational risk in not spending the borough's Household Support Fund allocation and having to return funding to the DWP. Mitigation of this risk includes using a range of providers, a phased approach, and monitoring of spend and impact.

## **Comments of the Statutory Finance Officer**

30. All expenditure within this programme is within existing Council resource or externally funded. At present there are no additional costs beyond this.

## **Comments of the Monitoring Officer**

31. Clearly a partnership approach as outlined in this report makes great sense – some other councils have gone down this route. Given the scale of the challenge we need to move as quickly as possible whilst ensuring we have proper procedures in place to ensure that the right people are helped.

## **Background documents**

There are no background papers to this report

## **Appendices**

Appendix A – Cost of Living Conference feedback from frontline services

Appendix B – Cost of Living Working Group Action Plan 2022/23

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