

Appendix A - South Ribble Cost of Living Conference

Feedback from the front line

Session 1 – Key Issues discussion

What are residents presenting as the key issues which affect them? What is the impact of the cost of living crisis? Is there a sense of anxiety for the future?

Feedback received:

- School Uniform needed all year round - affordability is a key issue
- Private rented properties being sold by landlords to release funds - tenants can't afford to rent similar properties as rents have gone up
- Pressures on housing market and waiting lists - divorce rates up, domestic violence rates up, mental ill health increasingly common
- Landlords increasing rents to cover rising costs
- Mortgage payments rising with interest rates
- Essential rather than discretionary costs rising, i.e. food & utilities rather than non-essentials
- Demand for foodbanks & community shops rising - demand has increased by estimated 60% but donations dropped by 90%
- Food shopping prices going up for everyone, wherever you shop & whatever your budget
- Sense of anxiety about the future, especially budgeting - even for people who have managed well in the past
- Apprehension about unknown costs - media coverage does not help, element of scaremongering?

- Cohort of vulnerable people has changed from during COVID - no longer just based on health vulnerabilities
- Working poverty is a fast-growing issue – people who have never struggled before are starting to struggle now
- Data lag - takes time to co-ordinate statistics around who is potentially vulnerable and where, but we need a response now
- Stigma / Sense of shame - people are scared to ask for help, or unsure where to go
- Christmas appearing in shops – puts pressure on families / mental health
- Sense of hopelessness – strikes / tolerance of those striking, unrest, political uncertainty - everyone feels like they are struggling
- Businesses have COVID loans to pay back, contributes to rising running costs which are passed on to customers
- Digital financial management – potentially makes managing money harder
- Less face to face contact through self-service and digitalisation – vulnerabilities go unseen
- People are making a choice between eating or heating
- Access to dental care is diminishing and costs are prohibitive
- People turning to acquisitive crime e.g. shoplifting or fraud
- Unknowns with central government - leadership, direction, policies
- Cost of white / electrical goods and access to them – increased use of payday lenders / high interest credit
- Buy now pay later items bought during the pandemic, e.g. garden furniture, TVs now need to be paid for
- Affecting affluent residents who are either equity rich but cash poor, or have high expenses
- Negative impacts on mental health and wellbeing – poor mental health increasingly common, and more residents reaching crisis point

- Sense of hopelessness – no clear solutions or end date in sight
- Increase in self harm and suicidal thoughts / attempts
- People being forced into debt (sometimes new debt to clear old debt)
- Increase in domestic abuse and relationship breakdowns
- People not wanting to cook due to the prices of energy
- Heavy reliance on credit cards and buy now pay later
- Family dependency - over occupation of properties as adult children can't afford to move out or move back into parental homes
- Older family members supporting younger ones
- Increase in homelessness / social housing waiting list
- Number of people reporting anxiety is higher than it has ever been before - combination of pre-existing and new issues coming through
- Sense of worry and unknown for the winter months
- Anxiety being felt by all the family including the children – emotional avoidance of school is impacting on attendance

Real life examples

- Elderly lady eating porridge with water for every meal, just to avoid using gas and electric
- Elderly gentleman selling war medals to fund food and energy
- Young people requesting meals from the community centre to avoid passing on stress to parents due to financial issues at home
- 2-month-old baby sleeping in the same basket as 6 newborn kittens
- Child aged 1 sleeping on a hard-wooden floor with just a blanket

Session 2 – Our current response

What are individual organisations doing to support people? What works well? Could we learn from each other?

Feedback received:

- Community shops – very low-cost food and hygiene items is an excellent initiative, but are we serving the right people? Access is not borough-wide
- Household Support Fund – vouchers for energy support, home energy efficiency adaptations, support for charities and community groups
- South Ribble Together Hub / Network – one front door approach for vulnerable residents and associated network for professionals
- South Ribble Integrated Team – holistic, multi-agency support for those with complex needs (action focused, avoiding multiple referrals)
- The Base on Broadfield breakfast club – free food before school for pupils
- SRBC Uniform shop – reducing the stigma of free uniform with a ‘re-use, re-cycle’ environmentally friendly message
- Leyland Churches Furniture scheme – supporting move on and new tenants with household essentials
- Early years provision places - South Ribble uptake rates of funded places are high (75 – 80%) for children 2yrs +
- LCC Warm hubs will be offered this winter
- CAB Debt advice and money management courses
- Progress Housing Financial Inclusion Team – supporting tenants who are struggling financially
- SRBC Mental Health First Aid training – increasing awareness of mental health issues, symptoms and good practice in support and advice
- SRBC Holiday Activities and Food Programme – range of activities and meals for children across the borough in school holidays

- LCC Community Projects Team expanded from 5 to 8 staff - supporting community groups to access support and funding
- LCC Community Food Grant Scheme – increased from £90,000 to £160,000, with grants increasing from up to £1000 to up to £3000. Current round ends 18 September, new round starts in January 23.
- LCC identifies gaps in service provision and tries to fill them
- LCC funding data base for groups to access
- NHS Social Prescribing Team - additional social prescribers and wellbeing practitioners recruited
- Social prescribers offer low level mental health and anxiety support for those waiting for Mind Matters
- NHS focus on frailty with full assessments of patients to understand support needs
- Social prescribing initiatives, e.g. free walking groups, cooking courses, thermal packs
- Social prescribers carry out home visits to recent GP & A&E visitors
- Community Shops at CNOS, The Base, The Place, New Day (Lostock Hall) and Bamber Bridge – food, hygiene and sanitary items
- CNOS groups for youths, mothers and babies, ladies (primarily carers)
- CNOS events, e.g. fun day, afternoon tea for the elderly, christmas hampers
- CNOS fitness and mixed ability exercise groups
- CNOS drug and alcohol drop in
- LFRS - welcomed into homes in general – good eyes and ears for vulnerable households
- LFRS – safety / education campaigns e.g. safe cooking, open water

- The Base Community Café – hot food & drink to eat in or take away
- The Base shop – very low-cost clothing, household items etc (£1 per item)
- CAB provide advice energy efficiency / reducing bills
- CAB provide foodbank referrals
- Progress Futures offers support into employment / education
- Progress Staff paid volunteering day annually
- Progress Community investment fund can access to support for monies to support activities like community cafe
- Progress job clubs - 2 per week delivered at the Civic Centre

What works well?

- Creating a legacy, not short term fixes
- There are lots of opportunities for people to meet, chat and offload
- South Ribble organisations try to be one step ahead where possible – forward planning is key to effective responses
- Allowing young children to access events for parents which is often a barrier for them not being able to attend
- Networking & working together to achieve positive outcomes for our residents
- Information sharing between organisations stops people falling through the gaps

What can we learn from each other?

- Local organisations could work more closely together / network with each other more to ensure we know who is available and what they do
- To utilise social prescribing as a service more
- To encourage residents to take ownership of issues which affect them, and support them in tackling those issues

Session 3 – Operational Challenges

Are people 'slipping through the cracks' of service provision? Which are the high-risk groups? Who aren't we supporting? What are the barriers?

High risk groups

- Low income working households – those were already just about coping
- Single men – often lowest priority for many services
- Self employed and small business owners – many with COVID loans as well as rising costs
- Frail residents with health conditions – those most affected by lack of heating / poor diet
- Refugees / Asylum Seekers
- Digitally excluded – access to Wi-Fi / data is key
- Young people / care leavers
- Older people or those with chronic health conditions who have no family or support network
- Complex needs – those not able to access services for themselves

Challenges

- Sliding scale - the hardest hit already will fall harder
- Those just above the line but at risk of entering services with no prior experience - shock in terms of processes and access to services
- People who don't think they 'should have' benefits
- Upturn in benefit queries - those in the know on maximising their claim
- High risk group - home owners in houses (eligibility for services / cash rich / property poor)
- Terraced housing stock with poor insulation etc / owned out right and costs / maintaining
- Rogue traders / consumer issues for home improvements
- Identifying those most in need, if they don't show on typical data sets
- Getting people to accept support due to stigma and pride
- Data sharing - GDPR rules relaxed during COVID but now back to consent based approach

Barriers/high risk

- Older people living in their own homes often not eligible for support
- Being able to dig and identify through the right questions - face to face contact is important
- Barriers around knowledge in services and pathways for people is essential
- Language barriers
- Money – lack of!
- Zero hour contracts are a growing issue – long hours vs. no hours, low rates of pay, task & finish

Session 4 – What can be done?

Next Steps and how can we work better together

- More frequent networking opportunities for services supporting South Ribble residents
- Marketplace offering practical support to residents
- Develop a directory of local support services
- Run a cohesive comms campaign, using all available methods, e.g. accurix texts from GPs, parentmail newsletters
- Continue the food offer as part of HAF during school holidays
- Offer extended HAF provision in October and February half terms
- Look to make school uniform available throughout the year
- Strengthen and evolve the youth council's voice
- Develop a network of Support Champions - individuals in groups around the borough who are referral points into services
- Need to improve accessibility and awareness of Refernet
- Invest in community assets – grow the infrastructure from which support can be offered
- Develop our understanding of each other's work / need the right level of information
- Client journey will be much better / smoother if services work together
- Social prescribing / navigating the system / one front door approach
- Offer services in the places where people go / create a positive environment to offer support
- Could provide charge points for devices / access to digital in a more 'cafe environment'
- Create a 'wander by' offer - Market / Worden / Museum / Libraries / Schools
- Structured and more coordinated approach to communicating what support is available
- Sharing resources, redirecting budgets, co-locating
- Consider adopting a trauma informed approach for staff and volunteers
- More multi-agency outreach and training – empower community groups and charities
- Work with Team Around the School and Settings (TASS) with LCC
- We need to ask generic questions to ascertain issues / struggles, not put people on the spot or highlight insecurities
- Inclusive approach needed to make sure we support as many people as possible

How can we support groups that are hard to reach?

- Better information sharing – creating a 'Directory of services and groups' and distributing this to residents and professionals

- Developing data sharing agreements between partners to allow for a more targeted approach
- Enhance capacity in outreach services to be in the right places at the right times
- Finding new ways to engage with and contact residents
- Continuation of funding – where possible

Where might we lobby?

National government / South Ribble MP
Lancashire County Council

Grant funding organisations
Local employers