

REPORT TITLE: COST OF LIVING PROGRAMME

21 SEPTEMBER 2023

REPORT OF PORTFOLIO HOLDER: Cllr Kathleen Becker, Cabinet Member for
Community and Engagement

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WARD(S): ALL

PURPOSE

In September 2022 the council announced the launch of a cost of living programme of support to households in the Winchester district who were struggling with the rapidly rising cost of living. This programme, in response to the unexpected rapid rise in cost of living and supporting the enhanced focus priority agreed in the Council Plan in January 2023, is in addition to the support being provided by central Government and takes into account the council's local understanding of the impact of the crisis on the residents of Winchester. This report's purpose is to:

1. Give an update on the enhanced support provided to residents by the council and partners from November 2022.
2. Detail the work that has been delivered as a result of the budget allocated to this cost of living (CoL) programme, including expenditure to date and the anticipated final projected outturn.
3. Provide information on the continued cost of living support available to households beyond September 2023.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

That the Policy Committee are asked to note:

1. The support provided to residents by the council and its partners in response to the Cabinet announcement to fund additional cost of living support measures in September 2022.
2. The continued cost of living support available to households beyond

September 2023.

1 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

1.1 Resources September 2022-2023

1.2 Following the announcement by the then Cabinet Member for Housing & Community that funds were to be allocated to supporting residents with the cost of living crisis, the council's Community team were assigned lead responsibility. The programme of work has been overseen by the Communities Manager with support from a contracted member of staff, who has been working up to 30 hours per week since 11 November 2022, with the contract finishing on 28 September 2023.

1.3 In September 2022, a budget of £200,000 was allocated to enable delivery of intensive support for six months. An additional provision of £60,000 was made in February 2023 as part of the 2023/24 budget to extend the programme for a further six months. The table below summaries expenditure under the programme and forecasts the expected outturn at the end of September 2023.

Activity September 2022- March 2023	Expenditure
Programme management and co-ordination – Consultancy	£11,550
Practical support to residents – Citizens Advice Winchester District	£60,000
Cost of Living Emergency Grant scheme	£60,000
Communications campaign	£2,000
Cost of Living summit	£1,450
Total Expenditure	£135,000
Budget	£200,000
Carry forward	£65,000
Activity April - September 2023	
Programme management and co-ordination – Consultancy	£15,345
Practical support to residents – Citizens Advice Winchester District	£25,295
Enabling access to services and support	£31,500
Business support programme	£4,000
Free summer holiday activities	£13,750
Access to training and healthy eating	£7,500
Communications campaign	£5,000
Partnership / network facilitation	£2,000
Total Expenditure	£115,390
Budget (plus carry forward)	£125,000
Outturn	(£9,610)

1.4 The remaining £9,610 will be used to fund an additional post in the Customer Service Centre reception, which will help to signpost those in need to assistance and will help us to quickly support those with queries about our

continuing cost of living support schemes, with the Council Tax Support Fund continuing and a third round of food vouchers going out.

- 1.5 Many teams in the council have provided additional support in terms of their work to assist those on low incomes and most in need of assistance through the cost of living crisis. Details of this work is found in section 2 of the report.

2 SUPPORTING INFORMATION:

What is the cost of living crisis?

- 2.1 The UK “cost of living crisis” started in late 2021, and the term refers to the fall in “real” disposable incomes (that is, adjusted for inflation and after taxes and benefits) that the UK has experienced. The “cost of living” is a measurement based on the average amount of money people in a particular place need to be able to afford basic living expenses such as housing, food, taxes and clothing.

The Council’s response

- 2.2 The Housing & Environment Policy Committee on the 4th October 2022 received a presentation on the planned approach to “Pivoting our services and resources to support our residents and businesses with the cost of living crisis”. It set out five clear objectives for the work:
- a) Helping residents access support quickly and easily.
 - b) Offering extra support to our most vulnerable residents.
 - c) Helping residents cut their carbon and reduce their energy bills.
 - d) Making it easy for residents to find and access relevant information.
 - e) Working with our partners to co-ordinate our efforts and maximise our joint impact.
- 2.3 The key areas of work to be funded from the £200,000 budget allocation were also set out and the package of measures included:
- a) The launch of a Cost of Living Emergency Grant Fund that will be used to provide additional support to partner organisations who can provide advice and practical support to residents – this includes help to reduce and manage energy bills, help to access benefits and grants, help to access food and other types of emergency support.
 - b) Calling a local Cost of Living Summit to bring together partner organisations from across the Winchester district to discuss how we can best work together to coordinate and maximise our efforts and our impact.
 - c) Developing a dedicated webpage to help people find the information they need quickly and easily, with direct links to available support.

- d) Ensuring, where appropriate, that the council's own services are focused on offering targeted cost of living support.

2.4 In order to provide focused coordination for this programme of work the council identified the need for a Cost of Living co-ordinator. The responsibility of this post was to project manage and drive at pace the proposed measures and desired outcomes.

Initiatives undertaken by the Communities team under the CoL programme

2.5 A CoL programme was devised that set out the work and activities to be delivered, enabled and facilitated by the council, stakeholders, community organisations and partners. Details of the delivery and outcomes of the intervention measures are as follows.

2.6 Cost of Living Emergency Grant Fund

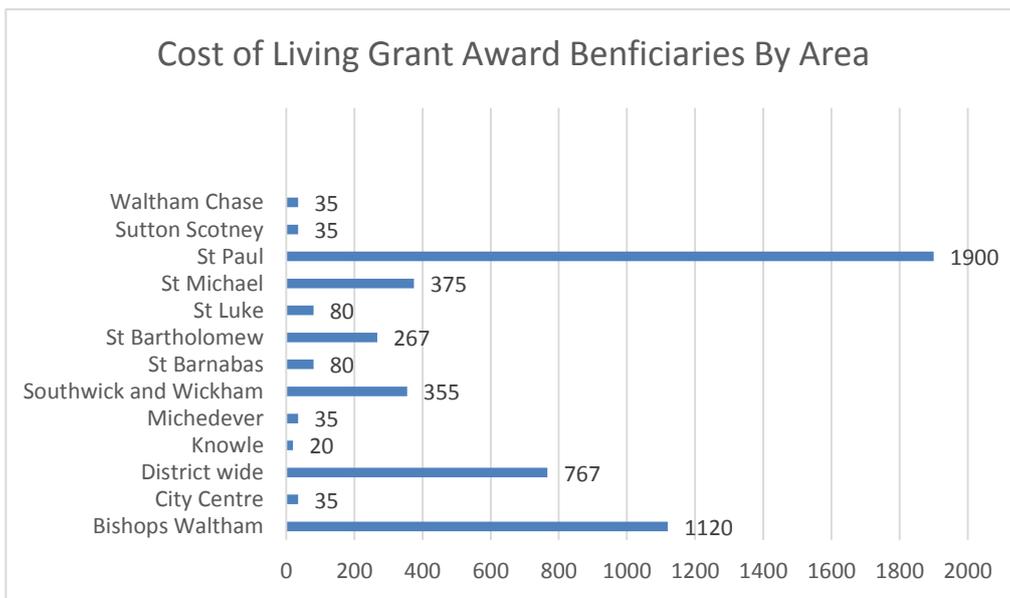
- a) Launched in November 2022 the fund was to help organisations supporting people with the rising cost of living in the Winchester district. Voluntary groups, not-for-profit organisations, registered charities and Town and Parish councils, amongst others were eligible to apply. The fund had five strands and sought project with outcomes for:

- (i) Increasing access to information, support and guidance
- (ii) Providing information and support to reduce costs
- (iii) Increasing social interactions to help reduce anxiety and improve social inclusion in warm spaces
- (iv) Overcoming barriers to accessing services such as transport / IT equipment or access to the internet
- (v) Helping to access essentials such as food or clothing.

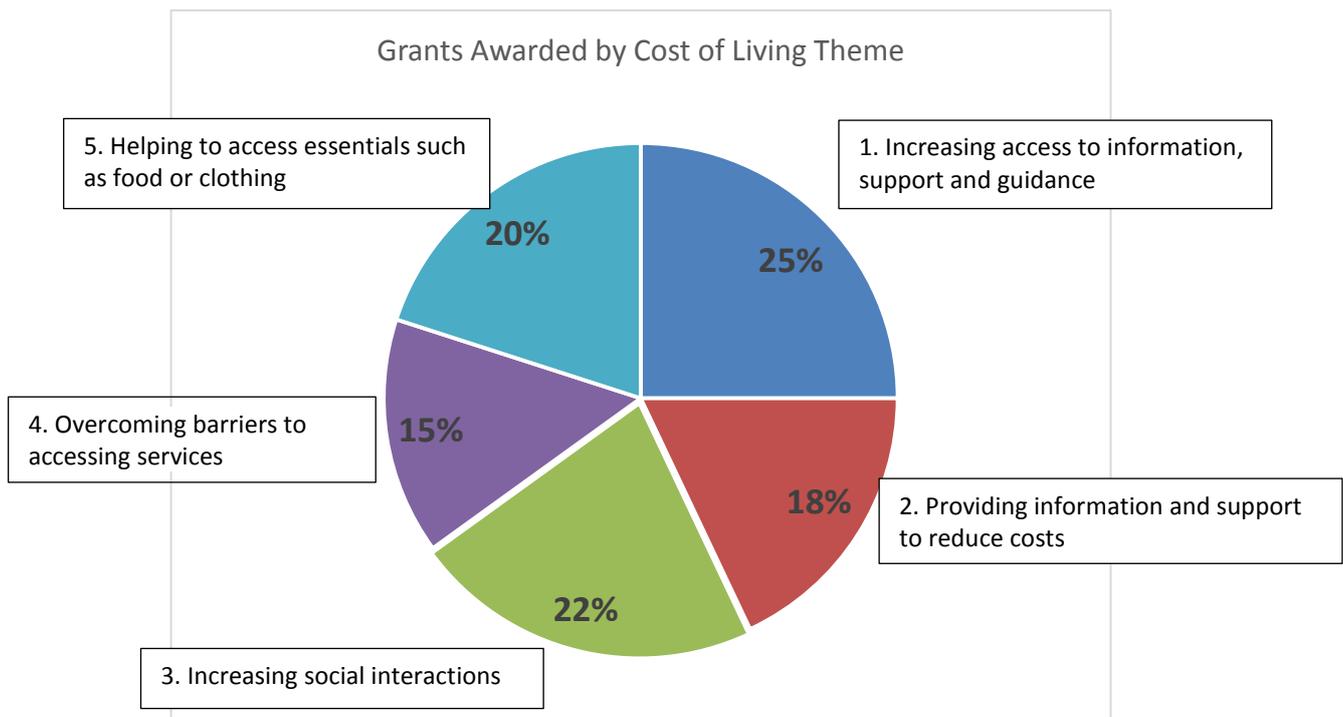
- b) A fund pot of £60,000 was created offering grants of between £1,000 and £5,000. Round one of the CoL Grant Fund launched on the 22nd of November and closed 31st March 2023. The CoL fund reopened for a second round on 22 May 2023, closing on 31st July 2023. In total 16 grants were awarded to the value of £56,074 and supported nearly 5,100 people. The following organisations were awarded CoL grants:

Organisation Name	COL Grant Awarded
Street Reach	£3,528.00
MHA Communities (Winchester)	£4,947.00
Winchester & District Young Carers	£1,426.00
Unit 12	£3,400.00
The Winchester Beacon	£10,000.00
Wickham Parish Council	£3,000.00
Hope Church Winchester	£2,250.00

Home-Start Winchester & Districts	£1,729.00
Awaaz FM Community Radio	£2,155.00
Peter Symonds College	£3,572.00
Bishop's Waltham Parish Council	£2,162.00
Housing 21	£2,943.44
Wickham Community Association	£4,913.00
MUNCH	£2,306.00
Winchester Trinity	£4,776.00
Winchester Student Union	£3,000.00
Number of Grants Awarded: 16	Total awarded: £56,074.44

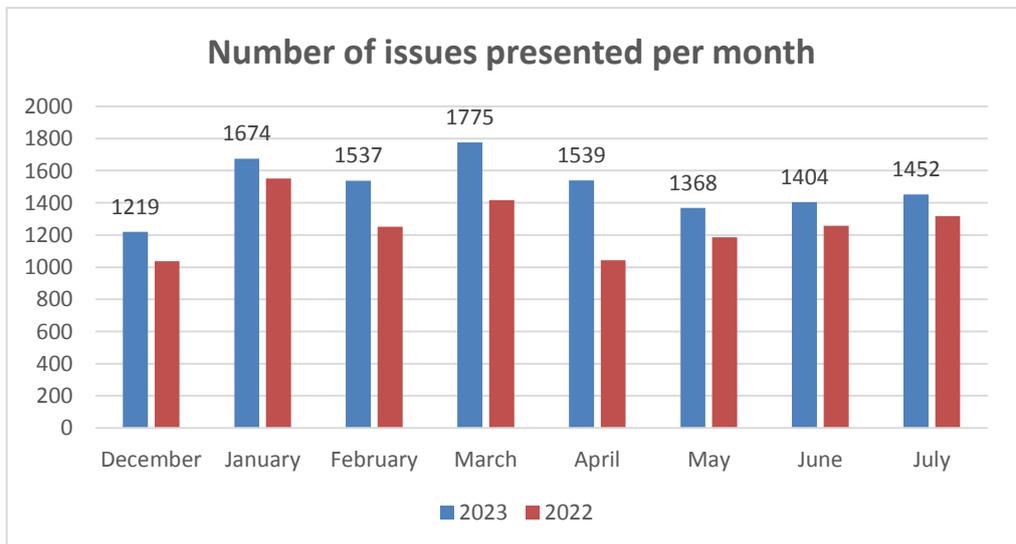
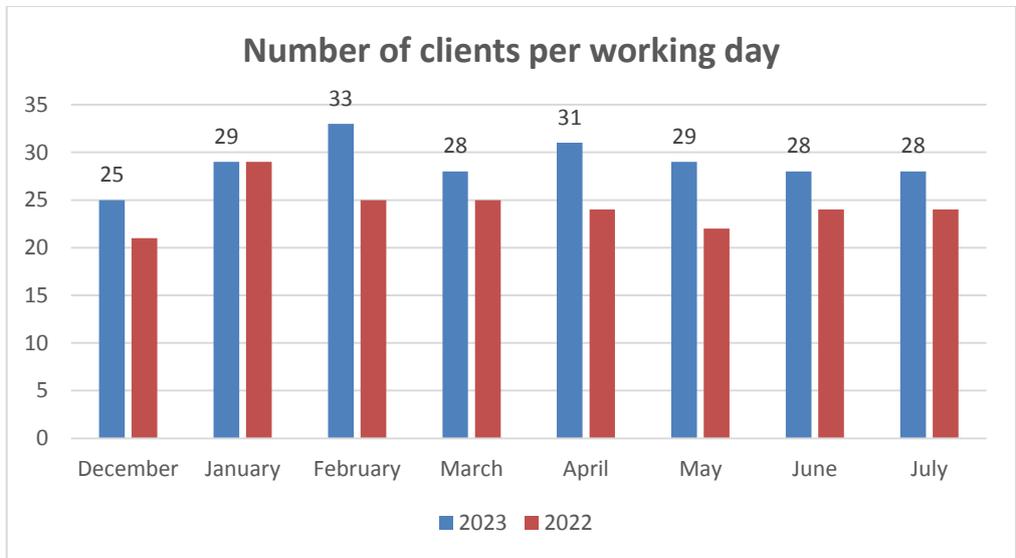
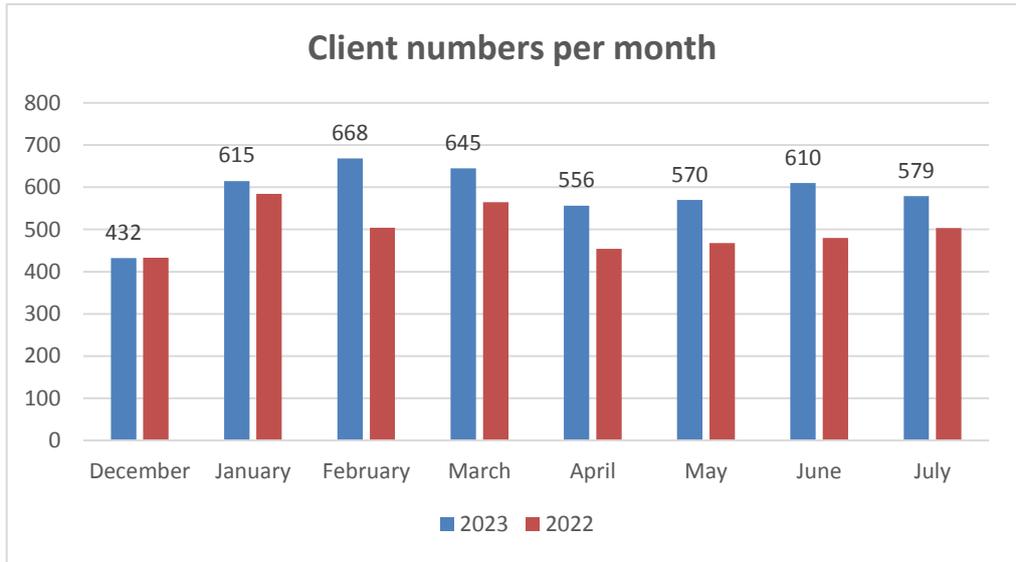


Total Beneficiaries = 5099

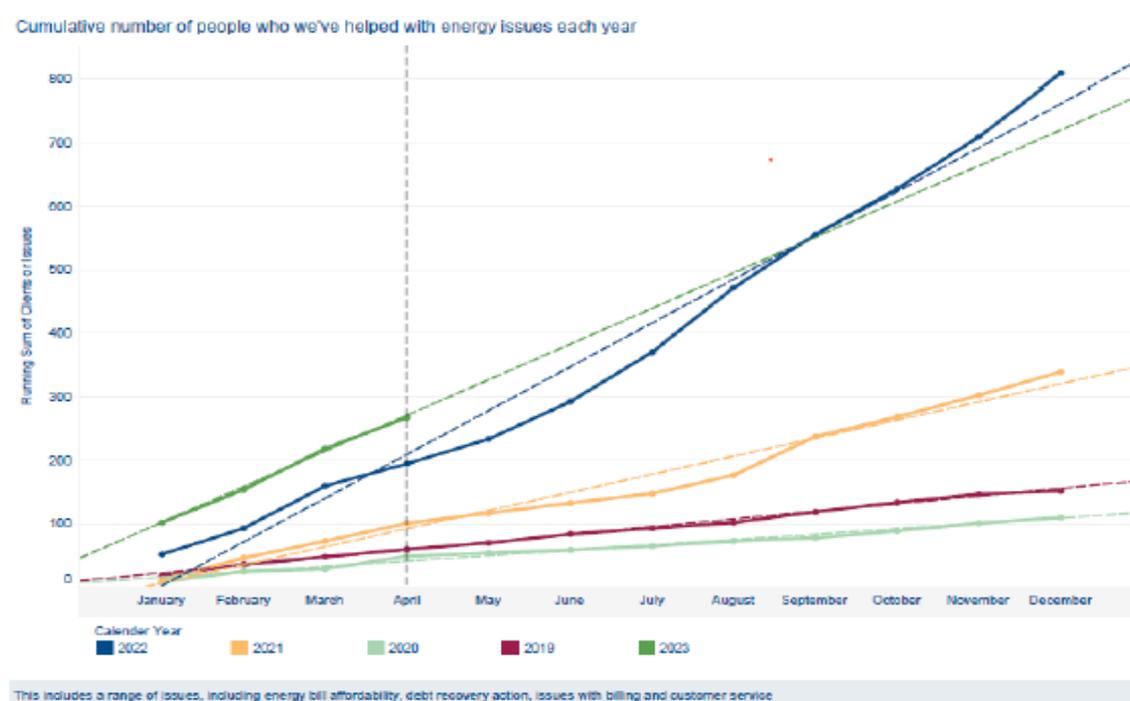


2.7 Enhanced Citizens Advice services

- a) In recognition of the unique role Citizens Advice Winchester District (CAWD) plays in supporting residents and acting as a trusted source of advice, they were awarded a grant of £60,000. This was to provide additional advice and practical support to the district's residents for six months between December 2022 and May 2023. A further grant of £25,295 was awarded to extend this service provision until the end of September 2023. The grant enabled additional staffing capacity in order to meet the increased demand and to:
- (i) Help residents to access benefits and grants, to access food and other types of emergency support and to reduce and manage energy bills.
 - (ii) Provide emergency/crisis vouchers for people in immediate need.
 - (iii) Provide outreach to places across the district where people are in need and to people who are most vulnerable.
 - (iv) Support partners to build their skills and capacity to help and respond.
- b) This support enabled a significantly increased number of clients to be helped with on average three CoL issues each. During this period CAWD generated just over £0.5m of financial gain by for example helping people access benefits or grants or by reducing debt.
- c) CAWD numbers for advice given per month increased significantly:



- d) Demand for CAWD services had increased significantly. In the four months to the end of April 2023, CAWD had seen more people with energy issues than during all of 2019 and 2020 combined, just below the total for 2021 and is currently tracking above 2022. The graph below shows cumulative energy clients by year, with dotted lines to indicate the expected trend.



2.8 Cost of Living Summit

- a) The council hosted the summit at the Guildhall on Tuesday 22nd November 2022 with around 70 delegates from 40 organisations attending. Bringing together partner organisations from across the Winchester district encouraged organisations to work together to coordinate and maximise support for those struggling and ensure that any gaps in support were addressed.
- b) There was a strong sense of collaboration and positive discussion, with connections formed, ideas shared, and plans made. The CoL grant fund was launched at the summit.
- c) The information provided at the summit was also shared with Parish Councils at an open meeting on 13th December 2022.

2.9 Dedicated webpage and access to information

- a) The dedicated section on the council's website with information for residents on cost-of-living support and advice has received almost 20,000 visits since the launch in October 2022. Visits have reduced from the peak, with 2,787 visits during April to June 2023. The top three

sub-pages viewed by category are: Money & benefits, COL grant scheme, Food & clothing.

- b) Below are some examples of the social media content that the council published to support people facing cost-of-living challenges:

The image shows a Facebook post from Winchester City Council. The post text reads: "If you did not automatically receive energy bill support this winter, you may be eligible for alternative funding. You have until 31 May to apply - for more information, please visit the link below [link icon] <https://bit.ly/3HXb9xl> Additional advice and support around the heightened cost of living can be found on our website [link icon] ... See more". Below the text is a large green graphic with the UK Government logo and the text "Help for Households". The main headline in yellow says "One month left to apply for energy bills support if you didn't receive it automatically". Below this, it says "Search 'energy bills alternative fund' on gov.uk". The bottom of the graphic shows a row of modern houses. At the bottom of the Facebook post, there are buttons for "See Insights and Ads" and "Boost post", and a share count of "1 share".

Winchester City Council
Published by Harry Usborne · 11 May · 🌐

If you did not automatically receive energy bill support this winter, you may be eligible for alternative funding. You have until 31 May to apply - for more information, please visit the link below [link icon]
<https://bit.ly/3HXb9xl>
Additional advice and support around the heightened cost of living can be found on our website [link icon]
... See more

UK Government | **Help for Households**

One month left
to apply for energy bills support
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Search 'energy bills alternative fund'
on gov.uk

See Insights and Ads | Boost post

1 | 1 share

Winchester City Council
Published by Harry Usborne · 26 June · 🌐

We're hosting three pop-up support hubs throughout July and August to offer cost-of-living advice and support to both council tenants and private sector tenants.

Our Tenancy Sustainment team will be joined by [Winchester District Citizens Advice](#), as well as a work coach from the Department for Work and Pensions, to give advice around benefit entitlement, debt relief, sustaining your private or council tenancy, making the most of your income, and more.

Dates and locations for each of the hubs can be found below - you don't need to book, just turn up on the day! 📍

- Monday 10 July, 3pm to 6pm 📍 Wickham Community Centre
- Thursday 20 July, 3pm to 4.30pm 📍 Sun Hill Junior School, Alresford
- Thursday 17 August, 10am to 1pm 📍 Unit 12 Community Pantry, Winnall

[See Insights and Ads](#) [Boost post](#)

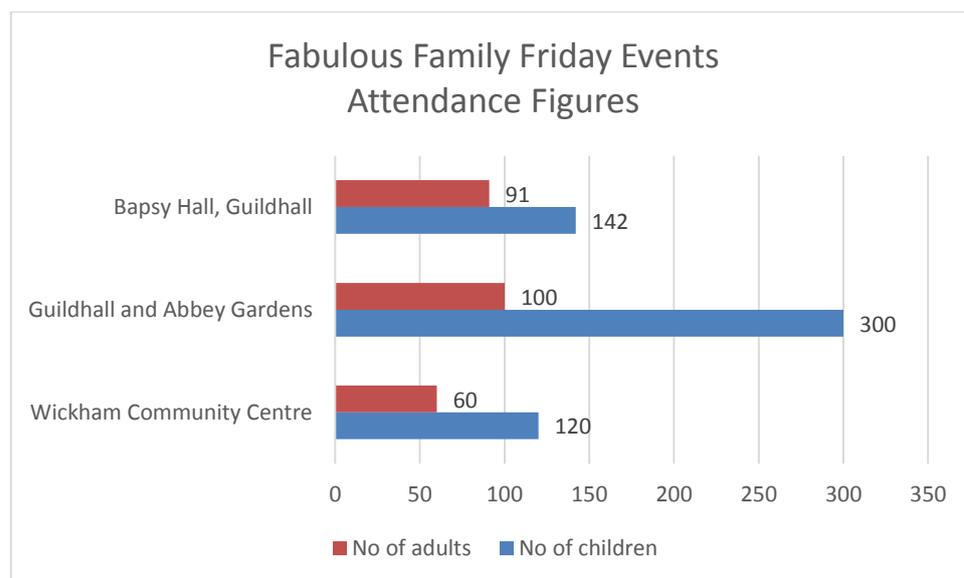
👍 2 10 shares

👍 Like 💬 Comment ➦ Share

Write a comment... 🗨️ 😊 📷 GIF 📌

2.10 Services focused on offering targeted cost of living support

- a) **Fabulous Family Fun Fridays**
- b) The council has delivered a series of free, fun, family activities throughout the school holiday month of August in order to assist with alleviating the burden of the Cost of Living, particularly for families with school aged children. Events were held in Winchester and Wickham - locations with areas of multiple deprivation and low income, as well as the intended family demographic.
- c) The Fabulous Family Friday events have been very popular, with more than 500 children and 250 adults attending and some really positive responses.



- d) Only a small proportion of families were known to be repeat attendees from a previous event, so a large number of people benefitted from the activities. The majority of families who attended received a Winchester Citizens Advice Cost of Living help and support leaflet.
- e) Local families attended from across the district, with people reporting they had come from Winnall, South Wonston, Alresford, Durley, Stanmore, Wickham, Bishopstoke, Hedge End, Waltham Chase, Fareham and Knowle, Romsey, Kings Worthy and Otterbourne. The benefit was therefore felt across the district.
- f) Most families saw the event information advertised on Facebook and valued the event and its role to help them with rising living costs. Some direct quotes from families at the events can be found in this Hampshire Chronicle article - [Fabulous Family Friday at Winchester Guildhall | Hampshire Chronicle](#).
- g) Local families who attended by bus mentioned the Single Fare Price Cap Scheme where fares are limited to a flat rate of £2 for each single ticket. This was welcomed but one family mentioned when you have 2 or more children, the cost of travelling in and out of the city was significantly impacting on family budgets. It cost them £8 each way and £16 was a significant cost to the family budget.
- h) **Week of Health and Wellbeing sessions 21st – 23rd August**
- i) The council engaged ActiveMe 360 to provide free to access activity and wellbeing sessions in Wickham, Winnall, Highcliffe and Stanmore. The two-hour wellness sessions combine yoga, games, mindfulness, relaxation and arts & crafts.
- j) The number of participants were lower than we anticipated however, 27 participants with an average age of 8 attended the sessions. 50% of those who attended were eligible for free school meals and 1 attendee identified as having special educational needs.

- k) 33% of those who attended were from Stanmore, 30% from Winnall, 22% from Highcliffe and 15% from Wickham. The following maps show where children attended from:



Winchester district locations



Winchester City Centre locations

- l) Parent and child feedback on the sessions was very positive. 90% of children said that they had never done any form of yoga or wellbeing activities before; 75% said that the session left them feeling calm, happy and relaxed and 95% said they would love to do yoga again.

2.11 The infographic shown in Appendix 1 provides a snapshot of the impact of the various initiatives provided by the council. As a legacy from the CoL programme it is our intention to create an updated and comprehensive

infographic which will conclude the council's enhanced, short term crisis support.

Refocusing of council services

- 2.12 Revenues and Benefits paid over 31,900 households with £4.9m of Energy Rebate grants, EBSS Additional Funding grants, and / or Additional Fuel Payment grants to directly help residents with the rising costs of energy bills. They also organised delivery of over 12,000 food vouchers to the value of £462k to low-income families (mainly those on Council Tax Reduction, Housing Benefit and Pension Credit) through the Household Support Fund. In addition to this they continue to support residents every day through the administration of Housing Benefits, the Council Tax Reduction scheme, Discretionary Housing Payments and the Exceptional Hardship Fund (all benefits amounted to over £25m, for reference using 2022/23 financial year).
- 2.13 Revenues and Benefits also supported businesses with the administration of all Business Rates relief schemes. The Retail, Hospitality & Leisure scheme was increased from 50% (2022/23) to 75% for the current year. This relief provided direct support of £4.1m in 2022/23 to £5.7m in the current year to over 680 business rates accounts. In addition, awards of Small Business Rate Relief (£5.5m), Charitable and Not for Profit Relief (£4.8m) and Covid Additional Relief Fund (£0.6m) assisted over 4,000 businesses in 2022/23 to reduce the gross rates payable by 22%.
- 2.14 Housing have assisted council and private rented tenants in maintaining their tenancies through support with budget plans and money management. Crisis food provision has provided FareShare food to tenants in immediate need, supplemented by food and fuel vouchers. We have been able to support 82 families with food and fuel vouchers totalling £7,860. The food vouchers reach tenants within the hour, providing fast access to help which they can redeem at their closest supermarket. We have also given out 102 emergency food parcels and 35 sanitary packs to families and single people in immediate need. Over 70 families 'just about managing' from five local schools received food parcels. The Summer Munchies scheme ran in two venues over the summer holidays to provide free lunches to local families. A welfare fund supports tenants with items such as white goods and furniture as a last port of call and was able to assist 121 tenants with essential items since the beginning of 2023. The team also recognises the impact of the cost-of-living crisis on tenants' mental health and has worked with the Primary Care Network and Social Prescribers to ensure that they can access the right mental health support. Across our support services for tenants, we were able to help them secure over £300,000 of additional income.

Tenancy Sustainment	£165,778
Financial Inclusion	£72,506
Sheltered Housing	£10,587
CAB	£65,033

- 2.15 Housing – Facilitating and supporting the Social Inclusion Partnership to develop and deliver its objectives and outcomes.
- 2.16 Corporate Communications have delivered an information campaign, with key themes delivered primarily via social media and through use of videos. Facebook activity has seen 46 posts linking into cost-of-living work, which have been seen 109,333 times and have generated 5,271 engagements.
- 2.17 The Communications team also created a series of website pages to enable easy to find information, which have had a combined total of 17,636 page views, with 11,356 separate visitors.
- 2.18 The Customer Service Centre has experienced an increase in visitors with more complex enquiries. These take longer to resolve and can require input from several council teams.

Continuation of support to households

- 2.19 We understand that times are still challenging, with residents still experiencing financial difficulties and pressures that lead to wider social and health concerns. CAWD advise that there is an increase in service users presenting with relationship issues and that issues are more complex and take much longer to resolve, especially with an increase in client numbers.
- 2.20 The council's response, initiated in September 2022, was to inject funds and resources to rapidly deploy support where most needed and at the earliest possible time to prevent the consequences of this crisis being more acute. This assistance was designed to be intensive and short-term - not intended to be sustained at this level long-term.
- 2.21 Whilst the issues and impacts around the Cost of Living continue for some people, through this programme of work they should now be more aware of how they can access support. They are better able to plan for future higher costs and those in greatest need will still be able to access the council support and services it provides.
- 2.22 The original programme of work has also created a legacy of enhanced support that will help people long after the additional funding comes to an end. From October 2023 onwards, the support available to households will continue to be built around the original programme objectives:
 - a) Helping residents access support quickly and easily
 - (i) CAWD remains the highest funded organisation through the council's community grant programme, in recognition of the vital support it offers to struggling households. It will continue to provide advice and support services and continues to adapt its services to meet client demand, with the cost-of-living programme helping to bring about an expansion of its outreach services.

- (ii) CAWD has also helped to upskill the staff of numerous other organisations to be more aware the challenges facing their own clients and to enable them to provide a basic signposting service, either to CAWD itself or to other sources of support. This increases the network of support and the speed with which people can receive assistance.
- b) Offering extra support to our most vulnerable residents
 - (i) The council continues to support residents through Housing Benefits, the Council Tax Reduction scheme, Discretionary Housing Payments and the Exceptional Hardship Fund.
 - (ii) Further funding has been renewed by government for the Household Support Fund (Hampshire and the Isle of Wight) for the period April 2023 to March 2024. In liaison with Revenues & Benefits, the County has agreed a further round of food vouchers allocating £313k to Winchester for the distribution of 1x £50 food voucher to all those in receipt of Council Tax Reduction, and 1x £80 food voucher to those in receipt of Housing Benefit only (set date for allocation to be determined). Work is currently underway to identify recipients which is expected to be in the region of over 6,000. The distribution of vouchers should in progress by mid-October 2023.
 - (iii) The Housing team will continue to assist council and private rented tenants in maintaining their tenancies. This will include budget plans and money management, crisis food provision, food and fuel vouchers and welfare fund for items such as white goods and furniture. Collaboration will also continue with the Primary Care Network and Social Prescribers to ensure that they can access the right mental health support when required.
- c) Helping residents cut their carbon and reduce their energy bills
 - (i) Tackle fuel poverty in council-owned dwellings by investing in the retrofit of existing council housing stock, continuing a fabric-first approach, and delivering low energy homes through the New Homes programmes.
 - (ii) As part of work to tackle the climate emergency, and in line with the emerging Carbon Neutrality Action Plan update, work will be undertaken to increase awareness and take-up of schemes such as the Warmer Homes Programme and Solar Together Hampshire. By increasing the energy efficiency of homes and increasing renewable energy generation, households can reduce their monthly costs as well as reduce their carbon emissions.
- d) Making it easy for residents to find and access relevant information
 - (i) The council's website content providing information on means of support and assistance for struggling households will be retained

and the information regularly updated to reflect the latest situation.

- e) Working with our partners to co-ordinate our efforts and maximise our joint impact
 - (i) The council's ongoing grant programmes will welcome applications that support people struggling with the cost of living and provide funding to organisations providing help and assistance.
 - (ii) The Social Inclusion Partnership will continue to bring together partner organisations work with partners and connect with teams internally, retaining a focus on cost of living as well as wider inclusion issues. This collaborative working was hugely welcomed at the summit late in 2022 and the Social Inclusion Partnership allows this to continue.

2.23 **Conclusion**

2.24 The CoL programme has been delivered in accordance with the objectives set out when the one-off budget allocation was made in September 2022. Over the past year thousands of residents have been helped and supported, and a wide range of partner organisations have come together in this common goal. Now the programme has completed support work will be available and accessed in the normal way across the council services. It is therefore recommended that success of the programme is acknowledged and that it will be completed at the end of September 2023 with support for residents continued where practical and appropriate to do so within the council's business as usual service delivery.

3 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED

3.1 This is an update report – no other options have been considered.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS:-

Previous Committee Reports:-

[Cabinet meeting: 14 September 2022, Cost of Living intervention budget announcement point no 7](#)

[Cabinet meeting: 9 February 2023, Cost of Living/Living well budget, point 2f](#)

Other Background Documents:

None

APPENDICES:

1. Cost of living infographic

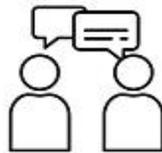
COST OF LIVING SUPPORT

A HELPING HAND

Winchester City Council provide vital support to residents facing rising food and energy costs. Over £1500 in food vouchers have been distributed by housing teams as well as emergency support with energy costs and assistance with travel requests.

The "Summer Munchie" project is offering support to those needing help to access food during August.

FREE Health and Wellbeing activity sessions are being offered in partnership with Active Me 360 across Highcliffe, Winnall, Stanmore and Wickham. A series of Fabulous Family Friday Events run throughout August to offer free activities during the school summer holidays.

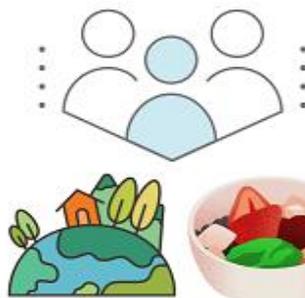


HELP TO ACCESS INFORMATION, ADVICE AND GUIDANCE

Over 13,000 visits have been made to our dedicated cost of living help and support web pages. District wide Warm spaces are also promoted via our link to the 'Warm Welcome Initiative'. By linking with key advice and guidance agencies we will improve access to help and support/

WORKING WITH PARTNERS TO MAXIMISE IMPACT

By listening to over 70 key agencies who attended our Cost of Living Summit, we continue to work in partnership to enhance access to cost-of-living related support. As a result of direct feedback from the summit, we enhanced access to out of hours support services, funded dedicated Cost-of-living Advisers via Winchester District Citizens Advice service and promoted under-utilised services so residents can locate and access cost-of-living support services near to them.



SUPPORT VIA OUR COST OF LIVING GRANTS

£57,000 in grant funding has been awarded to organisations supporting residents across the diverse Winchester district area. Funds awarded will benefit over 5000 vulnerable residents who are being heavily impacted by rises in the cost of living. Projects funded target all age ranges from families with babies and young children, to young adults, older adults and older people over eighty.