



**Corporate Policy and
Resources Committee**

**Thursday, 15th December
2022**

Subject: Cost of Living Crisis Update

Report by:

Chief Executive

Contact Officer:

Nova Roberts
Director of Change Management, ICT and
Regulatory Services

nova.roberts@west-lindsey.gov.uk

Purpose / Summary:

To provide an update on actions and initial proposals in response to the motion resolved by Council on 4 July 2022; for additional financial support measures for 'socially vulnerable households' with future costings to be determined as part of the budget setting report at to the February Committee.

RECOMMENDATION(S):

1. To approve the initial proposals to provide support, information and funding via partnership working and central government schemes for Cost of Living crisis support, models and key actions.
2. To support further development of the WLDC website to provide increased focus on specific local cost of living initiatives, support, guidance and advice.
3. To approve the further development of costings be incorporated in the February budget setting report to committee after the Local Government settlement on 21st December 2022.

IMPLICATIONS

Legal:

None arising from this report.

Financial : FIN/123/23/SL

A Motion to the meeting of Council held on 4th July 2022, “Additional Financial Support for Socially Vulnerable Households” moved by Cllr S Bunney <https://democracy.sharedlincs.net/documents/g3129/Printed%20minutes%2004th-Jul-2022%2019.00%20Council.pdf?T=1> resolved that an allocation of funding from prior year underspend be reallocated to support Socially Vulnerable Households.

Following the update provided in this report, Officers recommend any associated cost will be identified and created as part of the February 2023 Budget Setting report to Committee. This will provide details of any cost of living support in addition to that already provided through grants or centrally funded schemes that are locally delivered.

Due consideration will be given to the impact of the Local Government Settlement and the impact on the Council. Any allocation will be to fund both the financial support and delivery of the programme. Any amount will allow for the General Fund to remain at a prudent level above the minimum general fund balance of £2.5m.

Staffing : HR187-12-22

A Cost of Living Officer Working Group has been established and is responsible for developing an action plan for delivery of cost of living support. Any additional actions arising from this report will be absorbed into the workstream of this working group. The rising cost of living is already resulting in additional demand for Council services, which is impacting capacity of Council staff. Co-ordinating work with multiple external partners will have a further impact on capacity. This will result in the need for either additional resource, or for other work to be paused in order to prioritise cost of living support. The Cost of Living Action Plan must therefore be supported by a resource plan to understand the implications for service delivery and on staff capacity.

Equality and Diversity including Human Rights :

The Cost of Living Officer Working Group recognises the impact of the rising cost of living on all West Lindsey residents, and West Lindsey District Council staff. The working group accepts that the cost of living crisis will adversely impact certain groups more than others including, but not limited to, those on low incomes; people in receipt of benefits; people with disabilities; the elderly; the district’s most deprived communities and those living in rural areas whose homes are off-grid. As such, the Cost of Living Officer Working Group is working to ensure that any support packages are targeted towards those in greatest need.

Data Protection Implications:

None arising from this report.

Climate Related Risks and Opportunities:

The Council's Climate, Environment and Sustainability Impact Assessment has been undertaken and there are no climate related implications, risks or opportunities arising from this report.

Section 17 Crime and Disorder Considerations:

None arising from this report

Health Implications:

The rising cost of living, including a rise in food and energy bills, will adversely impact the health and wellbeing of our residents. Those with low or squeezed household incomes may be unable to afford to adequately heat their homes, creating poor living conditions and potentially exacerbating existing health conditions. The worst affected households may have an inadequate or regular supply of food, which brings health implications and will place additional demand on the district's foodbanks. Financial anxiety will impact people's mental wellbeing which may place additional demand on services offering support for mental wellbeing.

Title and Location of any Background Papers used in the preparation of this report :

Motion to the meeting of Council held on 4th July 2022, "Additional Financial Support for Socially Vulnerable Households" moved by Cllr S Bunney
<https://democracy.sharedincs.net/documents/g3129/Printed%20minutes%2004th-Jul-2022%2019.00%20Council.pdf?T=1> (p.31 of the draft minutes)

Report on the Outcome of the September 2022 Cost of Living Crisis Summit from Corporate Policy and Resources Committee on 10th November 2022

<https://democracy.west-lindsey.gov.uk/documents/s33013/Outcome%20of%20the%20September%202022%20Cost%20of%20Living%20Summit.pdf>

Risk Assessment :

The Council's reserves are currently in a healthy position; however, the following risks need to be considered against the background of expected reductions to public spending in the forthcoming Local Government statement:

1. The government has indicated that significant reductions to public spending and will be announced as part of the Local Government Settlement on 21st December 2022. The impact of the figures announced,

by the government have stated that reductions will apply across all departments which is likely to impact the Council's financial position and the full impact of this will not be known at this stage. There is a risk that committing to additional financial support for the cost of living without understanding the scale of public spending cuts will adversely impact the Council's reserves.

2. Since the motion to Council on 4th July 2022, the government has announced a range of financial support packages to support people with the cost of living. These are outlined in this report. There is a risk that, by committing to additional financial support now, the Council may be unable to provide targeted support to vulnerable people in the longer-term, for example during the winter months when financial hardship is likely to be at its highest.

3. As per the staffing implications identified in this report, there is a risk that the Council does not currently have the capacity to deliver any new programmes of work. Any new programmes of work related to cost of living support will require additional capacity which can only be identified through pausing other work, which will impact on delivery timescales or recruiting additional staff, which will take time to deliver. Both of these options will have a financial implication for the Council.

4. Existing organisations that provide support to vulnerable residents will also be struggling with increased costs due to higher energy bills and increased inflation. There is a risk that any additional financial support scheme could place undue burden on partner organisations, for example through increased demand. In identifying any actions that impact external organisations. The Council will need to engage with external organisations to ensure any agreed actions are viable and feasible.

Call in and Urgency:

Is the decision one which Rule 14.7 of the Scrutiny Procedure Rules apply?

i.e. is the report exempt from being called in due to urgency (in consultation with C&I chairman)

Yes

No

X

Key Decision:

A matter which affects two or more wards, or has significant financial implications

Yes

No

X

Executive Summary

Following CP&R on 10th November 2022 Members considered a report which presented the findings from the multi-agency Cost of Living Summit which had been hosted by West Lindsey District Council on 26th September 2022.

The purpose of this report is to present to this committee the initial proposals for additional support measures for 'socially vulnerable households' in response to the motion resolved by Council on 4 July 2022.

It is recommended in this report that any associated cost will be identified and created as part of the February 2023 Budget Setting report to Committee. This will provide details of any cost of living support in addition to that already provided through grants or centrally funded schemes that are locally delivered.

This report provides an update based on the emerging findings from the Summit, data from frontline services partners delivering support to residents with the recommendations presented in this report for consideration and approval. The Council are acting as facilitators and enablers, working in partnership to encourage networking between existing organisations, establishing funding streams so that they can support West Lindsey residents, and applying appropriate governance and audit of any future funding and spend.

In order to develop the proposals consideration has been given to the best approach in a currently changing financial environment with significant unknowns the Council is facing and an ever-changing situation. With the Authority's current sound financial position as a result of prudent management, any commitment of reserves would require careful consideration in line with the outcomes of the Local Government Settlement so, full implications on frontline services on any actions taken must be sustainable, fully costed and address real need. Consideration is given to the already existing funding gap and the unknowns of the revised Government settlement presented and therefore it is more prudent to wait for the outcome of this settlement. This would enable the Council's core business needs to be secured.

As highlighted in the risk implications there are a wide range of financial support packages offered by Central Government, many of which are and expect to be administered locally, some of which such as HSF and CTER are already in place. Some are being extended or replaced for 2023 and this also needs to be considered against the background of expected reductions to public spending arising from the Local Government Settlement as additional financial support for the cost of living without understanding the scale of public spending cuts will adversely impact the Council's reserves.

The report also highlights how the National, County and West Lindsey initiatives currently support Voluntary and Community Groups and how offering greater support to such organisations could have the potential to provide community led support which matches needs identified locally and the need to be flexible to respond to the changing situation.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The rising cost of living, caused by global political instability and rising economic uncertainty, is one of the most urgent issues currently facing people, particularly over the winter months. The government has responded with a package of targeted support, including a £400 energy bill discount for every household, a £150 energy rebate for CT bands A-D, capping energy bills at an average of £2,500 until April 2023 and additional financial support for people in receipt of the Winter Fuel Allowance, Universal Credit, Jobseekers Allowance, Disability Living Allowance (DLA) or Personal Independence Payments (PIP). Whilst this support has ensured that households are protected from average annual energy bills that were projected to rise to over £3,500, the increasing cost of household bills, fuel and food, rising inflation and higher interest rates will still result in financial pressure and hardship for large numbers of people.
- 1.2 Acknowledging the impact of the rising cost of living on West Lindsey residents, a meeting of Council on 4th July 2022 resolved that “*a scheme to offer additional financial support for socially vulnerable households... [be] developed and brought to the next appropriate meeting of the Council or the relevant Committee for consideration.*” As a result of this motion, the Council hosted a Cost of Living Crisis Summit on 26th September, bringing together partners from over 30 local organisations to understand the level of need and to explore appropriate packages designed to support those most affected by the cost of living crisis.
- 1.3 The Summit was a call to action, designed at strengthening partnership working across West Lindsey and providing detailed research and focus so as not to over-commit and create paralysis by overwhelming services. To prepare all research, data, workshop content and delivery of the Summit, WL worked with Cadence Innova at a cost of £8,855 plus VAT.
- 1.4 A key consideration when devising an action plan must be the capacity and resources available to each organisation, including the Council, to deliver additional support. Services across the Council are experiencing a significant increase in demand and workload, for example, as a result of administering support schemes such as the Household Support Fund which is now entering the third round with the fourth recently announced . This impacts capacity to deliver additional work with existing resources. A resource plan is therefore required to understand the impact of additional work related to cost of living support on the organisation.
- 1.5 The emerging findings from the workshop sessions were categorised into five key areas of need: Wellbeing and Inclusion, Mobility and Access, Health, Housing, Warmth and Safety, and Food.

2. Emerging Needs

- 2.1 The summit provided the identified solutions to ensure additional support is targeted at those most affected by the cost of living crisis. Emerging needs can be broadly categorised as:
- 1) The need for identifying appropriate resources and capacity to meet demand. This applies across all organisations, including the Council, for example, in being able to meet projected demand for round three and four of the Household Support Fund and increased demand across the organisation from the impacts of the cost of living changes.
 - 2) The need to identify funding to support specific actions, and to ensure due diligence and appropriate governance arrangements are in place through existing Council frameworks.
 - 3) A requirement for a centralised source of information that is accessible to all, consistent across the county and is published as widely as possible across partner organisations.
 - 4) The need for better information sharing and signposting between and across organisations.
 - 5) The need to establish satellite provision of key services for isolated residents and rural communities.
 - 6) Findings from the Summit should be developed and fed into the County wide Cost of Living Challenge Stakeholder Group meeting to ensure district representation and actions developed through the four identified subgroups.
 - 7) Identification of an exit strategy that ensure individuals and communities have the right support in place to ensure resilience and self-sufficiency in the long-term.

3. Delivery and Governance

- 3.1 There is an already established WL Cost of Living Officer Working Group, comprised of managers and senior officers directly involved in delivering front-line services to residents most likely to be affected by the cost of living. The working group meets fortnightly and is already working to an action plan centred on delivering financial support, such as the Council Tax Energy rebate and the Household Support Funds 1-4, supporting community groups, ensuring we understand and can meet increased customer demand, implementing a clear communication plan across all channels, creating the website pages and looking after the wellbeing of our staff. Attendees of this group will be reviewed to ensure it includes the right breadth of coverage across the organisation and the priorities and actions are agreed.
- 3.2 The key actions completed to date by the Working group include;
- Developed and delivered a WLDC Cost of Living website landing page set up with information being reviewed and added as required and confirmed from the County Challenge group.
 - Adaptations made to CRM to allow Customer Service Officers to log CoL related calls and track reoccurring and emerging themes.

- Frontline staff information collated and shared and reviewed for signposting
 - Reviewing what training can be arranged for cost of living related pressure for front line staff who carry emotional impacts from customers
 - Meeting monthly with WL Food Banks and reporting in to the Food Support subgroup from the County Challenge group
 - Discussions and data preparation to feed into all subgroups
 - Comm's insight and media focus provided for consistency and also linked to the countywide warn and inform group
 - Lead on the development and delivery of both the CTER and HSF funds
- 3.3 A full table of Cost of Living financial support, funds and grants is detailed in a table in Appendix One. As an example, one of the schemes administered from February – November by WL is the Council Tax Energy Rebate (CTER)
- 3.4 The Council have now paid 37,016 council tax account holders £150 council tax energy rebate scheme. These have all been paid from the mandatory scheme and the total cost is £5,552,400 which is fully funded by central Government.
- 3.5 WL have also paid, to date, 350 accounts from the discretionary scheme and these have also been paid at £150 totalling £52,500. These are also fully funded by central Government and we were allocated the sum of £169,950 for discretionary payments.
- 3.6 The scheme officially closed on 30 November. It was agreed at CP&R committee in November to divide any remaining discretionary relief balance to any Band E accounts that have not yet received a payment and this currently equates to approximately £33 per account. These payments will be made direct to council tax accounts to avoid bank payment charges.
- 3.6 The CP&R committee also agreed the promotion and use of the 'Connect to Support Lincolnshire' website (<https://lincolnshire.connecttosupport.org/>) on the Council's own website, as a central source of online help and advice; and as a community directory relating to the cost of living for all Lincolnshire residents, be approved.
- 3.7 This site also provides telephone support and live web chat to help people navigate support is available. It offers signposting to groups, activities, and support within local communities on topics such as:
- health and wellbeing
 - housing and independence at home
 - carers
 - getting out and about (travel and mobility)
 - volunteering and community
 - safeguarding

- money and legal matters

3.8 [Cost of Living Support](#) web page data analytics (Period: 20/10/22 to 28/11/22 – since page has been live on the site) are as follows:

- **Users** = 225
- **Page views** = 335
- **Unique page views** = 288
- **Average time spent on page** = 2 mins 58 secs
- Most users (180) accessed the page directly via the URL (which has been shared through comms emails).
- **Cost of Living page was 6th highest visited** page/area on the site during this period (behind: Homepage, Directory, Blue badge scheme and parking, Information and Advice, and Mental Health).

Connect to Support – general website data analytics (Period: April to September 2022)

- **Total Users has increased** to 12,891 for this period, up by 12.4% from the previous 6 months.
- **New Users** = 12,551
- **Page views** = 59,828
- **Most users** (10,598) accessed the website directly via URL. (Other methods are via: organic search, referral (from another website), email, social media)
- **Returning Visitors** = 2942. The returning visitor percentage is up to 19% from 16.8% in the previous financial year.
- **Most visited pages/areas** (in order) = Homepage, Directory, Information and Advice, Blue Badge scheme and parking, Activities and Events, Advice for Ukrainian Arrivals, Mental Health, Home Care Agencies and care homes.

3.9 The Cost of Living working group set up the WLDC Cost of Living landing page to provides help, support and signposting <https://www.west-lindsey.gov.uk/benefits-support/cost-living-support>

Introduction

This page contains information and support regarding the current cost of living crisis.

Contents

- [Council Tax Energy Rebate](#)
- [Benefits and Money Advice](#)
- [Help to Claim](#)
- [Pension Credit](#)
- [Lincolnshire Credit Union](#)
- [NHS Prescriptions and Health Costs](#)
- [Social Tariffs](#)
- [Turn 2 Us](#)
- [Money Advice and Pensions Service](#)
- [Debt Advice](#)
- [Help with Food](#)
- [Household Support Fund](#)
- [Discretionary Housing Payments](#)
- [Council Tax Support](#)
- [Wellbeing Lincs](#)
- [Connect to Support](#)
- [Help for households](#)
- [Mental Health Helpline](#)
- [Love Food, Hate Waste](#)
- [Green and Sustainable Living](#)

- 3.10 It is proposed that the Working Group support further development of the WLDC website to provide increased focus on emerging customer themes, specific local cost of living initiatives, support, guidance, top tips and advice.

4. Summary of Sub Group Progress

- 4.1 On recommendation of the County wide Cost of Living Challenge group four sub groups have been created to deliver consistent actions and identify emerging themes across the county to deliver focused coordinated actions in the four key areas of Warm Spaces, Food Support, Economic Resource and Communications.
- 4.2 The purpose of these subgroups is to co-ordinate plans and actions and to monitor and track progress to ensure effective delivery. West Lindsey District Council, City of Lincoln Council and North Kesteven District Council are leading this on behalf of County with the meetings taking place fortnightly and provide update reports on progress, share learning, and respond to feedback on emerging pressures and national guidance. Full responsibilities can be found in Appendix Two.
- 4.3 **Warm Spaces** – these are being developed across the County by Voluntary and Faith Groups and details are available on the national Warm Spaces Website, with links to this from Connect to Support Lincolnshire website. However, it should be noted that this is not comprehensive list and a mapping exercise is proposed to gain a comprehensive picture. A safeguarding protocol has been developed for Warm Spaces Groups including advice about actions in respect of Domestic Abuse – this can be shared with groups proposing to set up Warm Spaces. The provision of warm spaces is moving fast however, our customers can go to <https://www.warmwelcome.uk/> to find out where the warm spaces.
- 4.4 Warm Spaces can provide a warm and safe place, social activities and social networks, refreshments including a meal, healthy living, signposting

to other services including debt advice and income maximisation – in the longer-term the offer could be extended to provide Community Wellbeing Hubs strategically located across the County.

- 4.5 **Economic Resources** has recently been focused on finalising the County and District proposals for the Household Support Fund 3. This was approved on 28th November followed by an urgent decision as it was required to be implemented ahead of the next committee cycle. This includes proposals for West Lindsey to support residents and our voluntary partners and LCC to support families and single households with a focus on gradually removing food bank dependency by accessing Community Grocers.
- 4.6 Funding sources either available or being sourced include: National Grid Community Support Fund; CAF £3M funding for small groups; NHS Winter Pressures Funds; Social Justice Fund; THRIVE Appeal through Lincolnshire Foundation; UK Prosperity and Rural England Prosperity Funds; Energy Bill Support Scheme – Alternative Funding; Collective Oil Buying and Bulk Buying Warm Packs Schemes. All schemes and funds are detailed in
- 4.7 Mapping of available funding sources being undertaken by Lincolnshire Community Foundation – Local Government Settlement includes Household Support Fund 4, a range of Cost of Living Allowances and increase in National Minimum Wage – to be confirmed.
- 4.8 **Food Support** – food banks and food support organisations are providing more than emergency food supplies and are often the first place that people go to for support at time of crisis. They are currently also providing a safe place to make referrals to other services; an app (Revert) is currently being used in the food bank in Lincoln City which allows informed point of referral and is a virtual triage system; social media campaigns – have been positive for some in gaining increases in direct debits for food banks to use to match demand; Household Support Fund 3 has been approved also provides resources for Districts. This provides payment from the WL fund for food support of £39k – Food banks and Community Groceries; £12k for Voluntary organisations for provision of goods or vouchers for heat, light, warm clothing, energy saving etc.
- 4.9 Food Banks in towns and cities could also provide development support through coaching for new and developing groups setting up as food banks. This support from larger more mature organisations would provide focus on signposting for grant funding. All food support to be encouraged to register on the CTSL website and on the relevant District Council websites. HSF funding allocated to Districts for HSF 3 provides the opportunity for local distribution of part of the allocation to recognised local food support in payment to allocate to gain the best return on the investment for the people using the services.
- 4.10 **Communications** sub-group works in conjunction with the LRF Warn and Inform group and reports on local and national cost of living initiatives around the county; ensuring consistent messaging across the County with links in from NHS Communications Teams.
- 4.11 Further reminder is required about the information repository on CSL website and encouraging the completion of the form for local groups

inclusion with Warm Spaces featuring on the national Warm Spaces website. As well as virtual information via organisations websites consideration is being given to alternative communications mediums for those people not able to access virtually.

5. Emerging Customer demand themes

5.1 Customer demands and are monitored by the Working Group and key emerging themes and service demands are:

Council Tax and Benefits

- From Q1 to Q2: there has been a 14% increase in Housing Benefit or Council Tax Support claims and a 56% increase in Discretionary Housing Payment applications.
- An 8% decrease in payments actually awarded. Residents are applying but either have no shortfall in rent or they do have excess income to pay the rent shortfall and are speculative panic applications.

Customer Services

- Since 01st September – 30th November Customer Services have received **128 calls** with 83% from residents in Gainsborough
- There have been **75 walk-in customers and 29 email enquiries** specifically requesting support with Cost of Living issues.
- **36 referrals** have been made to the Citizens Advise Bureau energy redress scheme and 2 referrals through to the Wellbeing Service.
- Support with household bills and food support have been the main requests with other requests as:
 - Mortgage costs and petrol to travel to work
 - Debts with fuel bills and large monthly payments disabled children
 - Struggling with all costs after having a baby, in receipt of sick pay through Universal Credit
 - Off grid support needed to bulk buy oil
 - Assistance with upfront rental costs and furnishing new Acis property
 - Animal care costs
 - Arrears with water bill
 - No access to the internet or own transport to source financial assistance available
 - Cost of school uniform and winter coats
 - Unable to afford transport to hospital appointments
 - Needing transport support to take children to the free LCC activities over school holidays
 - Received entitlement for the year of CAB energy vouchers but still no credit on prepayment metre
 - Customers who are 'off grid' including those living in Park Homes, enquiring about support available to them

Housing

- Steady increase in applications to the housing register but this has been increasing since 2018. No sharp increase in applications at this point.
- No increase in homelessness applications at this point. Increase expected further into interest rate rises with landlord's unable to pay mortgages.
- In previous times of financial hardship, housing hasn't seen an influx of demand which makes increases more manageable.
- Risk comes from people not being able to afford rent increases and rather than paying what they can for rent, pay nothing which leaves them in a worse situation.

WLDC Website engagement

- From September to the 5th December, there has been a total of 3,267 customer visits to the Cost of Living landing page with 2,564 unique visits. The top page visits are:
 - HSF
 - Benefits support
 - Help with paying rent
 - Council Tax
- Social media coverage from September to the 5th December for cost of living has shown 202 engagements on Facebook and 65 engagements for Twitter with 19 retweets for the council.

Cost of Living Comms and Analytics

Facebook Analytics – September to Current

Impression	Comments	Likes	Shares	Engagements
17,651	72	56	74	202

Twitter – September to Current

Impression	Engagements	Retweets
2,990	65	19

- An example post is below:



6. Citizens Advice

6.1 Headline statistics for Citizens Advice support in West Lindsey from April 2022 to November 2022:

- **1,063** clients were supported with as many as **4,808** issues
Clients present with a key issue but quite often have accompanying issues, e.g. present with debt and are helped with maximising income through benefit take up or present with Universal Credit and are also helped with a debt or housing issue.
- **41%** of issues were regarding help with benefits and Tax Credits and Universal Credit
- **30%** of issues were regarding help with debt and financial services/capability
- Top benefit issues include **Universal Credit** initial claim and **Personal Independence Payments**
- Top debt issues include help with **fuel debt, council tax arrears and debt relief orders**
- **64%** of clients were female, **36%** male
- **58%** of clients had a disability or long-term health condition

6.2 CAB continue to support residents during the Cost of Living who don't have enough money to live on, helping them to maximise their income and get help to afford essentials like bills and food. Providing residents with support to claim all of the welfare benefits they are entitled to makes a significant difference to their income and their life choices. This includes helping those who are unemployed, working and on a low income, sick or disabled, of State Pension age, a carer or those responsible for children. Everyone is feeling the impact of the cost of living crisis, but we know that some will be hit harder than others and are more vulnerable.

- 6.3 The CAB data this year shows an increase in issues associated with the cost of living. As an example, data shows an increase in charitable support and foodbanks the first half of this financial year (192 issues) compared to the same period last year (53 issues). There have been a further 73 energy issues in the same period. Rent arrears with housing associations and private landlords has doubled and threatened homelessness has increased by 47%.
- 6.4 CAB help ensure residents are receiving as many cost of living payments as they are eligible for including help with their energy bills and essential items. Helping those in rented accommodation and those residents in rural areas, e.g. Alternative Fuel Payment will provide a one-off payment to UK households that use alternative fuels for heating, such as heating oil or LPG, instead of mains gas.
- 6.5 In October, the CAB Service Delivery Manager went on a Q&A session on BBC Radio Lincolnshire to get the message out about the cost of living support available to people and how to access our services.
- 6.6 Evidence suggests that it is very common for people with debts to become ill with stress, depression and mental health issues especially when they are being harassed by their creditors who constantly telephone and threaten action by bailiffs and the courts. Such illness frequently leads to the inability to work which exacerbates the situation further.
- 6.7 The impact on the health of those already in debt or those likely to get into debt will only worsen. CAB can refer residents to their specialist debt caseworkers, where the caseworker undertakes all dealings with the creditors and can support with Breathing Space, (The Debt Respite Scheme brought in last year which gives people legal protection from creditors for up to 60 days whilst they get help with their problems which is also used by WLDC). This support greatly reduces anxiety, stress and mental health issues and improves wellbeing. Debt clients can, in the same way, be referred for advice on maximising benefits and managing their day to day finances.
- 6.8 Given the clear link between poverty and ill-health, helping residents with their debt problems, to maximise their income and manage their finances will enhance their wellbeing and enable them to participate in their local community. All help to residents will reduce social isolation and depression and enable residents to move forward with their lives.
- 6.9 All of the CAB staff delivering advice are fully trained and competent in their respective advice areas however they are looking at further training around energy,(NVQ level 3 Awareness) to support residents further, e.g. Warm Home Discount, Priority Services Register, energy efficiency advice, grants, behavioural change, tariff and switching, payment renegotiations and rescheduling.

7. Voluntary and Community Groups- Main Challenges:

- 7.1 Increased demand on Foodbanks due to cost and supply of food and Community Spaces due to cost of heating a home and impacts on mental health
- 7.2 Increased costs for groups running a community venue are especially impacted with the increase costs of heating, fuel and electricity. Other costs and challenges include:
- a. Salary costs
 - b. Volunteer expenses
 - c. Cost of products (food, supplies, materials)
 - d. Cost of equipment (purchase or hire)
 - e. Vehicle/travel costs
 - f. Volunteer shortage. Applying for lots of different funding eats into the time of volunteers taking them away from core delivery.
 - g. Funding challenges and seeking new grants and alternatives post pandemic
- 7.3 These challenges have been based on 2 sources:
- Local understanding of officers through ongoing work with VCS and charities as well as level of demand for WLDC provided grant funding from different groups.
 - UK Civil Almanac 2022 produced by NCVO on summarising the state of the voluntary and community sector. 5 key insights from almanac summarised here: <https://www.ncvo.org.uk/news-and-insights/news-index/five-insights-voluntary-sector-civil-society-almanac-2022/#/>
- 7.4 A VCS 'State of the Sector survey' is due to launch by the end of November 2022 for community groups, charities, social enterprises and parish councils to capture details of activity, impact, sustainability and funding needs of VCS in West Lindsey. Survey results will help shape and direct future grant funding we deliver.

8. WLDC Community Grants

- 8.1 Increase in funding enquiries relating to building running costs
- Enquiries from organisations and Members
 - Due to increased costs of heating and electricity
 - Officers are supporting with WLDC grants or sign-posting to other funders
- Grant applications being received for core running costs from foodbanks and organisations providing warm spaces for example:
- £1,000 grant to support Caistor Foodbank running costs
 - £750 grant to support Bardney Gateway running costs providing a warm space

9. Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) support for cost of living

- 9.1 Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) organisations across West Lindsey play a critical role in supporting residents impacted by cost of living. It should be noted that the impact of cost of living may be attributed

to a wide range of other challenges people face including health & wellbeing, housing, access to food etc.

9.2 An example of support provided by a VCS organisation can be found in Appendix Three with other examples below including:

- **Foodbanks** – providing emergency and longer-term food support
- **Food provision – e.g. luncheon and breakfast clubs**
 - Luncheon clubs in Caistor and Keelby run on a regular basis providing a cooked meal for older residents at a heavily discounted price. Along with the food provision, the clubs also provide vital social connectivity for older people.
- **Food provision – e.g. community food stores**
 - Bread & Roses CIC operating in Gainsborough provide heavily discounted food for sale linked to other support for residents
- **Warm spaces**
 - Community venues are providing warm spaces both directly or as a result of providing other accessible activities, service and events. Examples include village halls, community hubs and community libraries

10. Action Planning, Delivery and Governance

10.1 Within the context of the strategic action plan from the County wide Cost of Living challenge group has identifies four objectives based on the following:

- Communications,
- Co-ordinating Activities,
- Acting Decisively,
- Influencing Local and National Decision Makers

10.2 The Sub Group Action Plans and the Lincolnshire Financial Inclusion Partnership Action Plans provide oversight from the T&F Group to ensure harmonisation and avoid duplication.

10.3 This activity combined with the identified actions based on the emerging findings from the Cost of Living Summit, and the Cost of Living Challenge Stakeholder Group and Sub-Group actions, merges these into the working group's existing workstream. This will allow time for officers to work funding options, work with partner organisations, including those present at the Summit to understand the impact on capacity, demand, emerging theme and best use of resources before jointly agreeing on coordinated actions for delivery.

10.4 At the same time, the Summit was a call to action and the urgency of providing additional support to those in greatest need is widely recognised and shared by all agencies present at the Summit, including the Council. With that in mind, the action plan will prioritise those actions that can be delivered; and clearly identifying which organisation is responsible for delivery of individual actions.

10.5 To ensure due diligence and good governance, particularly where an action may require funding or possible support of Council, grant

funding or use of reserves or resources, it is recommended that the action plan is delivered as a Cost of Living Crisis project, overseen by the working group and with project support from the Council's Change Management Team. Adopting this approach means that the Council's existing project management framework can be applied consistently. Action plan is in Appendix Four.

- 10.6 The organisation is committed to keeping an open line of communication with all those who attended and other organisations and groups across the district. Officers have provided initial feedback to these groups and representatives and will ensure joint-working steered by the officer working group moving forward with frequency and content of future communications built into the overall communication plan in line with the County Challenge group and sub groups.
- 10.7 Finally, it is proposed that members are kept informed of progress against the action plan via the Members' Newsletter, with the option to bring further papers to this committee on financial proposals and where a formal decision is required.

End

Appendices:

1. **Current Support Available** - National, Lincolnshire & West Lindsey (Table)
2. **Cost of Living Challenge Subgroups** - Responsibilities
3. **Example of Cost of Living Initiatives**
 - a. Gainsborough Foodbank (Gainsborough Salvation Army)
4. **Action Plans**

Appendix One

Current Support Available - National, Lincolnshire & West Lindsey

Customer Group	Qualifying Income / Benefit	Payment Detail	How to get it
Low Income households and Tax Credit recipients	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Universal Credit income-based Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) Income-related Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) Income Support Pension Credit Child Tax Credit Working Tax Credit 	£650 £326 paid out £324 will be paid out in November 2022	NO application needed – this will be paid automatically directly to the entitled
People with a Disability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attendance Allowance Constant Attendance Allowance Disability Living Allowance for adults Disability Living Allowance for children Personal Independence Payment Armed Forces Independence Payment War Pension Mobility Supplement 	£150 Paid September 2022	NO application needed – this will be paid automatically directly to the entitled
Pensioners	Winter Fuel Payment recipients	£300 per household (to be paid with normal Winter Fuel Allowance Nov / Dec)	NO application needed – this will be paid automatically directly to the entitled
General Residents – Energy Bills Support Scheme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All households with a domestic electricity connection in Great Britain are eligible for the £400 discount. There is no need to contact energy suppliers concerning this. 	£400 £66 October £67pm Nov to Mar 2023	NO application needed – this will be credited to the gas/electric accounts* by the suppliers (or the monthly Direct Debit reduced by this amount each month) *Pre-payment meter customers may be treated slightly differently depending on how they 'top up'
CT Energy Rebate (CTER)	Residents in CTAX band A to D properties Any remaining discretionary relief balance to any Band E accounts that have not yet received a payment at £33 per account.	£150 Paid direct to the CTAX payer (A-D) £33 per account for Band E	Mandatory and Discretionary payment now made with Band E's being allocated a smaller sum (£33) from remaining funds Both schemes close on 30 November 2022.
Alternative Energy Bill Support Scheme - Off Grid energy customers	People who do not have a domestic electricity contract, people who do not have mains gas, people who live on houseboats or in caravans etc	£100 Payment date not yet known – details to be decided by Government	** New ** Details not yet public This is replacing the CT Energy rebate scheme
National Grid Community Matters Fund	Grants up to £10k	Deadline was 15th November 2022	National Grid Electricity Distribution has teamed up with Localgiving to deliver a record £2.5million of funding to charitable organisations tackling fuel poverty in their communities.

			<p>National Grid Electricity Distribution is calling on charities, councils and community groups small and large across its four regions, to apply for grants of up to £10,000 to support people who need extra help this winter.</p> <p>The fund was open to all non-profit and statutory organisations, who are supporting households experiencing fuel poverty.</p> <p>All applicants will be informed of the outcome of their application by Tuesday, 15th November 2022.</p>
<p>Charities Aid Foundation (CAF)</p>	<p>Around 120 charities will receive grants between £5,000 and £50,000, with an average grant of £25,000. CAF will also provide resilience building tools and information to put organisations into a stronger position for future work.</p>	<p>The deadline for charities to express their interest for the first round was 23rd November 2022</p>	<p>Local charities across the UK are encouraged to apply for the new fund if they are addressing social injustice or working towards social equity to create a fairer society. Half of the available funds will be focused on organisations supporting refugees in the UK.</p> <p>https://www.cafonline.org/about-us/media-office-news/caf-launches-new-fund-for-small-charities-focused-on-social-equity</p>
<p>NHS winter pressures funding</p>	<p>Grants which are available in two categories:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Funding proposals up to £10,000 for single local areas 2. Funding proposals up to £20,000 for countywide initiatives 	<p>Deadline was 15th November 2022 (was extended by a few days, but now closed)</p>	<p>Seasonal pressures funding is now available to all VCSE organisations to support people who may have a mental health or social care need over the winter months.</p> <p>Support projects that will do some or all of the following areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support people to avoid accessing a GP appointment or emergency service by accessing alternative solutions and building their own self-care • Work in partnership with existing services to support people to safely return home from hospital more quickly • Enable people including carers and families, to gain additional support to help them with their mental health and wellbeing needs and reduce demands on our local NHS mental health services.
<p>Bishop of Lincoln's Social Justice Fund</p>	<p>Grants up to £2,500</p>	<p>Deadline 30th November 2022</p>	<p>Available to those smaller not for profit organisations and Anglican churches faced with increased demand for local services, or that have decided to open their doors during the Winter months to help residents stay engaged, keep safe and warm.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Priority given to cover the cost of food, heating, and support to improve mental wellbeing, with the panel particularly keen to hear from interventions in our rural communities.

<p>Redress energy voucher fund (Fuel Vouchers)</p>	<p>Issue up to three fuel vouchers per household, £28 for a single person household and £49 for a family.</p>	<p>Within 2022/23, providing funds still available</p>	<p>CAB South Lincolnshire has been awarded funding to support clients who are struggling to afford fuel and are at risk of self-disconnection from their energy supply.</p> <p>Eligibility Those who pay for their energy by pre-payment meter Be at risk of self-disconnection from their energy supply. This may mean:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • extremely low credit on their meter • an energy debt on their meter which has a severe impact on their ability to maintain sufficient credit • Unable to top up their meter due to insufficient income or an unexpected expense • Live anywhere in the UK <p>Can issue up to three fuel vouchers per household, £28 for a single person household and £49 for a family.</p> <p>Clients will need to be referred to the scheme. It is the referrer's responsibility to ensure that all evidence is provided at the time of referral.</p>
<p>HSF2</p>	<p>District Allocation (£301k)</p>	<p>Households with children £39k Non-children household £29.5k Pensioner Households £220k</p>	<p>No application was necessary Food Banks helped allocate vouchers</p>
<p>HSF3</p>	<p>Lincolnshire County Payments: £5.46m</p>	<p>LCC issuing £100 through schools to qualifying families (Early Years, Free School Meals) in Nov 2022 £2.62m</p> <p>Families with Early Years children £437k</p> <p>Children and young adults in care £65k</p>	<p>No application needed – families identified through education settings and County records.</p> <p>HSF3 runs to 31.3.23 (or when funding exhausted, whichever is sooner)</p>
<p>HSF3</p>	<p>District Allocation (proposals) (371k)</p>	<p>£20k – West Lindsey open application process £39k – Food banks and Community Groceries £12k – Voluntary organisations for provision of goods or</p>	<p>Application or referral needed for the WLDC £20k</p> <p>Any of the disabled benefits and qualifying disability.</p>

		vouchers for heat, light, warm clothing, energy saving etc	
HSF3	HB Customers not in receipt of any other means tested DWP or HMRC Payment	Housing Benefit recipients not entitled to National Cost of Living Payment £650, to receive a payment of £250	To be distributed in December to approximately 580 WLDC households-no application needed

2023 COL Support Payments

Low Income households and Tax Credit recipients	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Universal Credit • income-based Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) • Income-related Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) • Income Support • Pension Credit • Child Tax Credit • Working Tax Credit 	£900	NO application needed – this will be paid automatically directly to the entitled
People with a Disability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attendance Allowance • Constant Attendance Allowance • Disability Living Allowance for adults • Disability Living Allowance for children • Personal Independence Payment • Armed Forces Independence Payment • War Pension Mobility Supplement 	£150 per person with a disability benefit in payment	NO application needed – this will be paid automatically directly to the entitled
Pensioners	All Pensioner households	£300 per household	NO application needed – this will be paid automatically directly to the entitled

Appendix Two

Cost of Living Challenge Subgroups - Responsibilities

1. Working Group Lead to coordinate with the other subgroup chairs to share knowledge, report progress and emerging concerns collectively to the Lincolnshire Cost of Living Challenge Group
2. Working Group Lead to report progress to the Lincolnshire Cost of Living Challenge Group
3. Working Group Lead to report emerging concerns to the Lincolnshire Cost of Living Challenge Group

Actions:

- a) The four subgroup leads will meet on a fortnightly basis to update on progress, share learnings and respond to feedback regarding emerging pressures. An update from this meeting will be shared with the Cost of Living Challenge groups ahead of the fortnightly meeting.
- b) Each subgroup lead will approach nominated and required colleagues representing organisations from the Cost of Living Challenge group to create the working the specific groups to take actions forward

Responsibilities of the 4 Subgroup Workstreams:

Warm spaces: Evonne Rogers/ group members to be established

1. Provide a link to the objectives set by the Lincolnshire Cost of Living Challenge Group responding to feedback regarding pressures
2. Provide localised feedback on challenges being faced by warm spaces
3. To understand how the districts and stakeholders can register their warm space
4. To understand how the districts and stakeholders can further support residents in the use of a warm space
5. Co-ordinate activities in response to the actions directed by the Lincolnshire Cost of Living Challenge Group

Economic Resource: Martin Walmsley/ group members:

1. To identify, assess and move forward with applying for and / or distributing appropriate funding streams to cost of living initiatives
2. To work with a range of partners to ensure the most effective and joined-up use of funds
3. To ensure identified funding is directly paid to residents/businesses in need in the most efficient manner
4. To promote the availability of funds to residents, businesses and partner organisations
5. To lobby national organisations for further funding.

Food Support: Nova Roberts/group members to be established

1. Provide a link to the objectives set by the Lincolnshire Cost of Living Challenge Group and pressures identified from all key stakeholders.
2. Provide localised feedback on challenges to the access and supply of food and use of Food Banks
3. To understand how the districts and stakeholders can further support residents accessing the Food Support
4. To understand how the districts and stakeholders can communicate and signpost to Food support
5. Co-ordinate activities in response to the actions directed by the Lincolnshire Cost of Living Challenge Group

Communications: Joint leads Sarah Curtiss and Steven Welsby/group members to be established

1. To provide targeted communications directing people towards helpful local and national resources and links
2. To work with other CoL group chairs to ensure consistent messaging is delivered in a consistent manner across the county
3. To liaise with partners and ensure messaging is clear and concise and doesn't promise anything that can't be delivered
4. To ensure all communications are delivered in an empathetic and positive way where appropriate
5. To build trust with customers that the advice they are receiving is balanced and not biased in any way
6. To analyse what is being done to communicate support nationally in order to learn from previous campaigns to get the best possible outcome

Appendix Three

Example of Cost of Living Initiatives:

Gainsborough Foodbank (Gainsborough Salvation Army)

Food Bank Demand has quadrupled since the start of the Cost of Living Crisis.

Gainsborough Salvation Army has been running a Food Bank every Monday, Wednesday and Friday for a number of years. During Covid they saw demand double then after Covid the numbers settled at 30 people a week.

Due to the Cost of Living Crisis, Gainsborough Salvation Army have seen numbers of people needing help slowly rise as the weeks got colder and the price of food and energy increased.

In September, demand had doubled to over 60 people a week and in November The Salvation Army Food bank is handing out over 120 bags of food a week.

They are seeing a growing number of pensioners at the door needing a bag of food to help them through the week because they are faced with a choice; Heating or Eating. In the first week of November, they would often hear the phrase "I can't believe I'm at a food bank" uttered by both Pensioners and people with jobs.

In one week, they gave out 144 bags of food containing UHT Milk, Tinned Meat, Weetabix, Tinned Tuna, Pasta Sauce & Pasta, Beans, Soup, Tea bags. They have needed to buy extra food, spending over £170 in a week on UHT milk, Tuna and Weetabix.

But they are able to do what they do because of the generous support and donations of both food and money. Running the Food Bank is voluntary and Gainsborough Salvation Army covers the cost of running the building so that every penny goes to buy food.

In January, demand is expected to increase, but so long as they are able, Gainsborough Salvation Army will make sure that there is a bag of food for anyone in need.

**Appendix Four
Action Plan**