

# STROUD DISTRICT COUNCIL

## COUNCIL

THURSDAY, 20 OCTOBER 2022

<b>Report Title</b>	<b>RESPONSE TO THE COST-OF-LIVING CRISIS</b>			
<b>Purpose of Report</b>	To detail current and proposed work to support those who are being impacted by the emerging cost of living crisis in Stroud District.			
<b>Decision(s)</b>	<b>Council RESOLVES to:</b>  a) <b>Support the implementation of a cost-of-living crisis response set out in this report.</b> b) <b>Agree the allocation of the £100k funding previously committed to this work by the Strategy and Resources Committee.</b> c) <b>Delegate responsibility for developing this work to the Strategic Director of Communities in consultation with the Chair and Vice-Chair of Community Services &amp; Licensing Committee.</b>			
<b>Consultation and Feedback</b>	Consultation has taken place with partners who are working in the Stroud district to support vulnerable communities and individuals. This includes, alongside Gloucestershire County Council, Town and Parish Councils, voluntary, community and social enterprise organisations, registered housing providers and statutory partners, such as the police and allied health professionals.			
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<b>Options</b>	The funding has been made available via Central Government's Household Support Fund, distributed by Gloucestershire County Council and also as part of Stroud District Councils 2021-22 financial outturn reports. Allocations are earmarked to support residents challenged as a result of cost-of-living pressures and options for delivery would need to meet this requirement.			
<b>Background Papers</b>	None			
<b>Appendices</b>	Appendix A – Equality Impact Assessment			
<b>Implications (further details at the end of the report)</b>	Financial	Legal	Equality	Environmental
	Yes	No	Yes	No

## 1. INTRODUCTION / BACKGROUND

1.1. This paper outlines the work which is underway and proposed to support those who are being impacted by the emerging cost of living crisis. It sets out the current position with

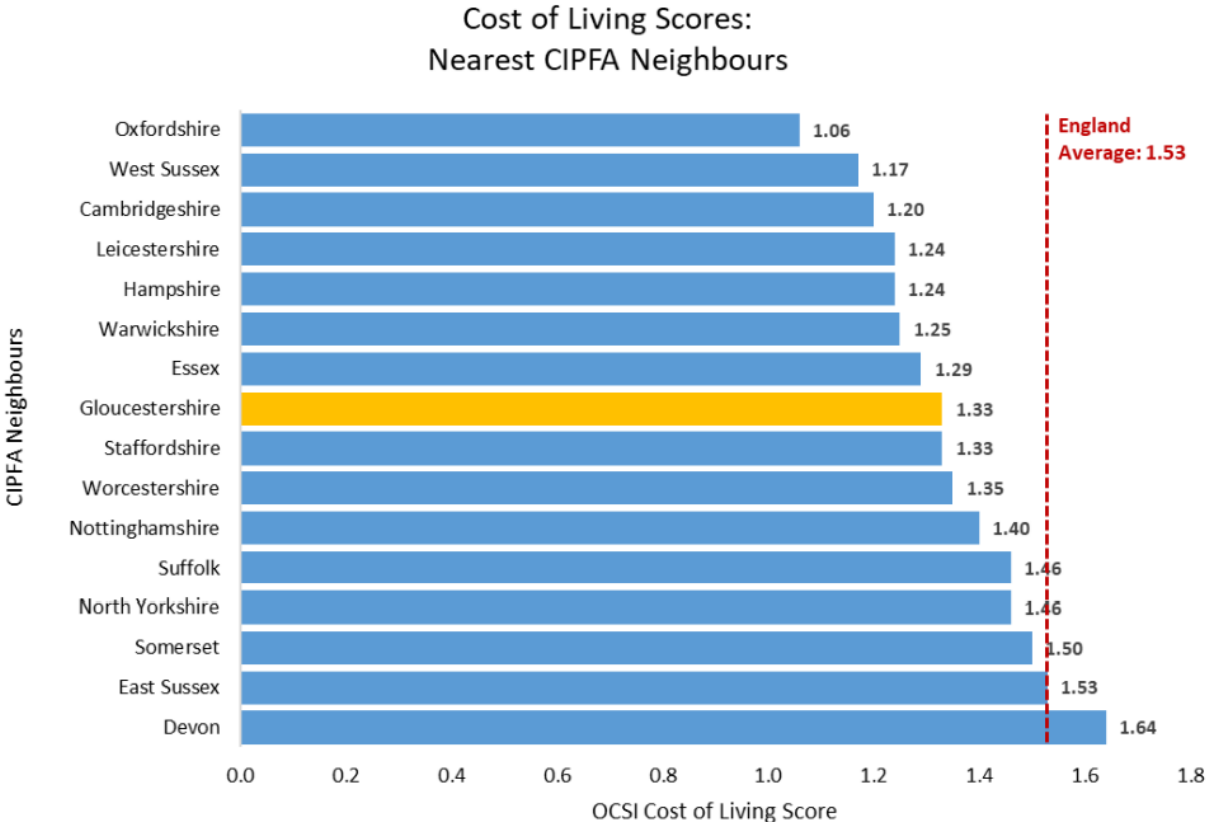
regards to the Household Support Fund, developing areas of concern which are emerging and proposed next steps.

**2. MAIN POINTS**

- 2.1 The Council has been already taken steps to support communities and groups affected by the emerging cost of living crisis. It is drawing on its own resources alongside central government support distributed through Gloucestershire County Council (GCC).
- 2.2 Looking forward, the strain on communities and on the resources across statutory and non-statutory agencies is set to increase significantly. A requirement for ongoing central government support seems likely and may be distributed directly or through local infrastructures.

**3. DISTRICT CONTEXT**

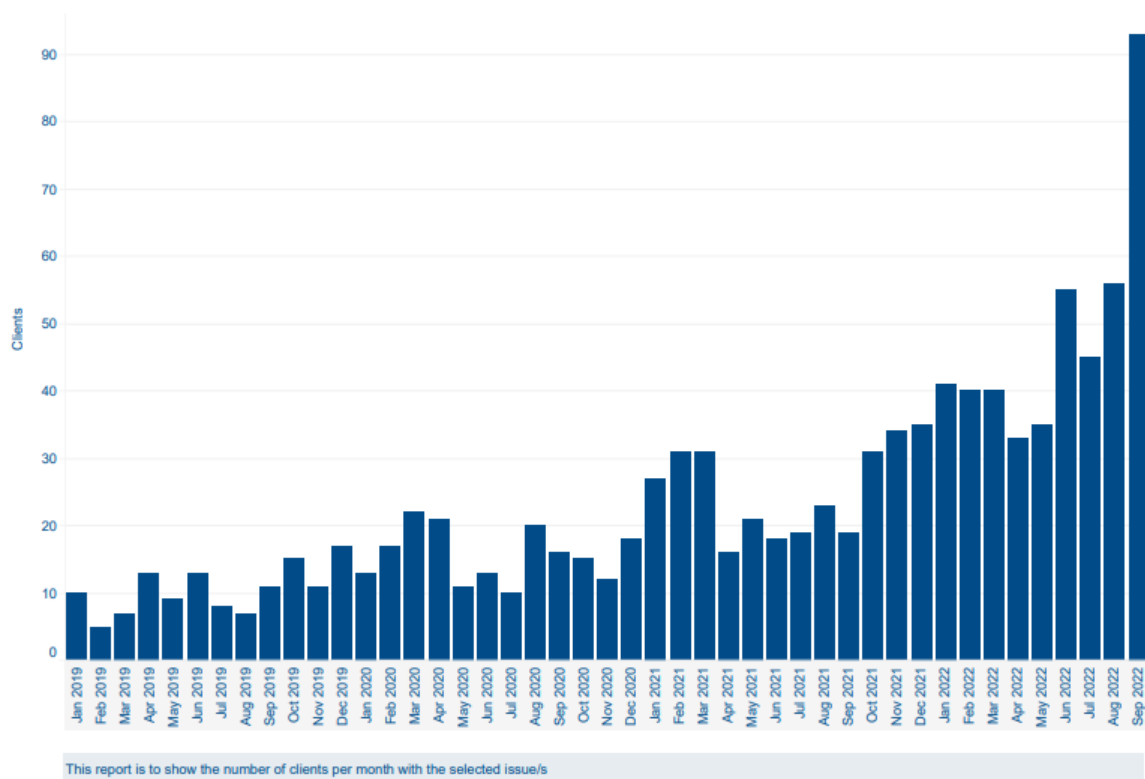
- 3.1 There is currently a lack of consistent, robust detailed information available about which groups will be most affected by cost of living challenges, particularly at a local level. However, Oxford Consultants for Social Inclusion (OCSI) modelled data for England for Local Super Output Area (LSOA, small geographical units averaging 1,600 people). The model identifies a risk rating of households falling below an acceptable standard of living as a result of rising costs. A higher score indicates higher vulnerability to cost of living pressures.
- 3.2 Compared to its statistical neighbours, Gloucestershire sits midway with a rank of 8 out of 15.



- 3.3 This data does not drill down enough to identify risk in the smaller areas of deprivation typical to Stroud District. In addition, rural communities are at higher risk of energy poverty due to the prevalence of poorly insulated homes, higher costs of living, transport, and lack of affordable food shopping options. Data from our local partners gives a better indication of the rising risks through the cost of living pressures to the district's population.
- 3.4 Stroud District Foodbank have provided the following data for their usage for the month of September 2022. Compared to September 2021, usage has gone up by 90%.

Foodbank Usage September 2022	Total Parcels
Dursley Ward	95
Stroud Slade Ward	93
Cainscross Ward	77
Stroud Farmhill and Paganhill Ward	45
Stonehouse Ward	43
The Stanleys Ward	41
Wotton-under-Edge Ward	38
Cam West Ward	33
Cam East Ward	29
Stroud Trinity Ward	24
Unknown	23
Stroud Central Ward	18
Severn Ward	17
Nailsworth Ward	16
Stroud Valley Ward	14
Kingswood Ward	11
Minchinhampton Ward	11
Berkeley Vale Ward	9
Chalford Ward	9
No Fixed Abode	9
Randwick, Whiteshill and Ruscombe Ward	7
Rodborough Ward	7
Amberley and Woodchester Ward	6
Coaley and Uley Ward	5
Painswick and Upton Ward	5
Stroud Uplands Ward	4
Hardwicke Ward	3
Thrupp Ward	1
<b>Total Adult &amp; Children Parcels</b>	<b>693</b>

3.5 Stroud District Citizens Advice has provided monthly data for requests for charitable support and food bank referrals from January 2019 and September 2022. Numbers have clearly risen sharply in recent months.



#### 4. WORK TO DATE AND PROPOSED NEXT STEPS

Local Foodbank and Citizens Advice figures show an increase in demand for support from those already in difficulties. National figures provide further context. In this environment, the Council’s local work to date and proposed next steps are set out below.

#### 5. HOUSEHOLD SUPPORT FUND

- 5.1 In September 2022 GCC provided the Council with £129,000 Household Support for families with children, people on Pensions Credit and other adults in need. This has primarily been spent on Tesco, Aldi or Co-op vouchers which were distributed through Citizens Advice and a network of Community Hubs or Parish Councils who agreed to participate. The Citizens Advice and Stroud Kids Stuff also hold a discretionary fund for people they are advising.
- 5.2 The Council has been allocated £123,000 from GCC for October 2022 to March 2023. On Monday 10<sup>th</sup> October, GCC will provide the Council with more detail about how the latest Household Support Funding should be allocated.

## 6. DEVELOPING CONCERNS

6.1 Officers have been working closely with partnerships over the last two months, assessing organisations' ability to manage demand. Identifying developing areas of concern indicates where our own district council response and support may be directed. Key issues identified include:

- **Overwhelm** – Agencies are concerned that these are unprecedented times and any further demand on services will overwhelm capacity. Frontline advice and support agencies are already working close to capacity and the anticipated growth in demand could result in enquiries not being dealt with. For example, on 15 September the Council wrote to 1050 residents on Pensions Credit inviting them to apply for a £30 supermarket voucher. Within hours of letters being received, telephone calls to Citizens Advice and Community Hubs outstripped their ability to answer calls.
- **Reliance on the voluntary and community sector** – our voluntary sector partners are increasingly providing support that the statutory sector would normally deliver. A partnership and collaborative cross sector response is required, and the role of local authorities (at every tier) needs to be clear and robust.
- **Volunteers burn out** – dealing with people in emotional crisis, with unsolvable financial problems is already putting pressure on volunteers. Stress, burn out and poor responses are likely to increase.
- **Basic training** – Notwithstanding considerable good will and undoubted effort, volunteers need to be aware of safeguarding duties, GDPR responsibilities, how to deal with emotional distress, food hygiene, and risk awareness through robust assessment when setting up warm spaces or delivering advice. Basic training is required.
- **Gap areas** – We have quickly seen that parts of the district have no local Hub or active parish council and no local place to turn for support in crisis.
- **Communication** – Support for Hubs and promotion of activity needs to be carefully planned with the Hubs. For example, when the Council and its partners have 'advertised' Community Hubs, they have quickly been exposed to more than just their local neighbourhood demand.
- **Warm Spaces** – The promotion and support for Warm Spaces, such as through a timetable of winter warmer events, need to be carefully considered. It is possible that opening community venues may generate challenges which the town and parish councils and/or the voluntary sector are unable to deal with both because of capacity and skills/experience
- **Resourcing Warm Spaces** – Some community groups with limited resources are likely to need a contribution towards heating, lighting, food, staff and professional support to cater for those accessing these spaces.
- **Fund Raising** – people want to donate towards a cost-of-living crisis fund. We need to ensure there is a transparent way of donating and distributing the money to those with the greatest need

## 7. SUGGESTED RESPONSE

7.1 In the context of the significant and likely long-term impact on our communities, the following action is proposed to allow a measured and sustainable response.

7.2 It seeks to recognise that alongside town and parish councils, the Community, Voluntary and Social Enterprise (CVSE) sector has a central role to play in delivering and enabling support on the front line to our communities. They are well placed to understand demand and to provide support where it is most needed. It is a network which has found its structure and 'voice' during the pandemic.

7.3 The Council's response, also shaped and informed by our experience during the pandemic will be first and foremost to enable and support. Its direct delivery should be targeted and agreed in partnership and collaboration with our colleagues across the county, such as The Gloucestershire Health and Wellbeing Partnership, GCC, town and parish councils, the Police and Fire and Rescue Services and registered housing providers. Our well-established partnership with the Citizens Advice service and voluntary sector networks such as the Grace Network will need to be woven in this. Proposed initial steps are therefore:

- **Cost of Living Crisis work stream and sponsor** – The Strategic Director, (Communities) is appointed to lead a focused Cost of Living Crisis work stream.
- **Cost of Living Crisis Team** – A group of officers from across services is identified to prioritise this work.
- **Cost of living enquiries** - A dedicated phone line and online information point is established. It will complement Citizens Advice work, which will deal with specialist financial advice and allow other local voluntary and community sector groups to deal with front line issues. The website will be updated to reflect the latest advice and guidance. For people who can self-serve, this should be the first port of call
- **Training for all front-line staff and volunteers** – Develop, alongside County-wide resources, a cross sector training and support resource.
- **Yellow Letter and Posters** – Directly contact through printed letters sent to home addresses of those who are not digitally active. Posters for public spaces including libraries, surgeries, shops and schools.
- **Mapping the Gaps – Build on work already underway** with Hubs lead and Town and Parish Councils to a map of Warm Space activities and identify where local support is not readily available.
- **Warm Spaces Coordination** – Work with key partners who agree to lead on Warm Room coordination for their areas to support this work and help managing demand. Council officers are already assessing key advice and training requirements for anyone offering Warm Space activities.

- **Distribution of future Household Supporting Funding** – The Cost-of-Living Team will review and decide the process for Household Support payments to be made from October to March.
- **Financial Contribution and Support for Community Hubs** – Deliver priority communication to Hubs informing them of the Council approach to give reassurance the council are leading on this work. A meeting with participating Hubs early next week to agree the role we would like them to take and how we will support this.
- **Funding Portal for Warm Spaces** – Support and build on the existing Hubs project online portal ready to collect and distribute funding to community groups offering Warm Space activities.
- **Comms Plan** – Produce a communications plan which will be developed throughout the crisis. We need to ensure that all partners are made aware of the key events within the plan.
- **Risk Register** – identify the emerging risks and associated mitigations associated with

## 8. STROUD DISTRICT COUNCIL'S BUDGET ALLOCATION

8.1 In addition to the Gloucestershire County Council Household Support Fund allocation, Strategy and Resources Committee approved a cost-of-living budget allocation of the £100k. It's proposed allocation is as follows:

<b>Issue</b>	<b>Cost of Living Budget</b>
<b>Cost of living enquiries management</b>	£15,000
<b>Training and Info for all front line staff and volunteers</b>	£2,000
<b>Yellow Letter and Posters</b>	£15,000
<b>Financial Contribution and Support for Community Hubs</b>	£10,000
<b>Warms Spaces Coordination</b>	£10,000
<b>Contribution to Funding Portal for Warm Spaces</b>	£5,000
<b>Estimated Crisis Response Spend</b>	<b>£57,000</b>
<b>Estimated Long Term Community Resilience Spend – including Community Food Hubs network, new Community Hubs development, Asset Based Community Development for priority areas.</b>	<b>£43,000</b>
<b>Total Cost of Living Budget</b>	<b>£100,000</b>

## **9. CONCLUSION**

- 9.1 The cost-of-living crisis is already having a significant impact across the district and is likely to deepen during the winter. Indications are that many of those who will be affected over the coming months/period will not have previously experienced fuel poverty.
- 9.2 The Council has a critical role to play, to support and enable an integrated cross sector response. It will work in the most appropriate and sustainable way. The form and extent of this response will inevitably be shaped by its own financial capacity and possible provision of resources from central government.

## **10. IMPLICATIONS**

### **4.1 Financial Implications**

The £100k funding allocation in Section 8 is currently held in an earmarked reserve, having been identified as part of the 2021/22 financial outturn process.

The Household Support Fund is funded in full by Gloucestershire County Council.

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### **4.2 Legal Implications**

The Council has broad powers under Section 1 of the Localism Act 2011, the General Power of Competence, to undertake the recommendations identified in the report. These powers must be exercised in accordance with the duty to obtain best value and in compliance with fiduciary duties.

There are no significant implications identified within this report. However, legal advice will be sought where required in the implementation of the Recommendations.

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### **4.3 Equality Implications**

An EIA has been carried out by Officers in relation to the decision made in this report and no equality implications arise.

### **4.4 Environmental Implications**

There are no significant implications within this category.