

Report to: **Hub Committee**

Date: **1st November 2022**

Title: **Cost of Living Response Plan**

Portfolio Area: **Cllr Tony Leech**
Hub Lead: Community Wellbeing & lead Member for Cost of Living

Wards Affected: **All**

Urgent Decision: **N** Approval and clearance obtained: **Y**

Date next steps can be taken:

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RECOMMENDATIONS:**That the Hub Committee:**

- 1. consider and endorse the Cost-of-Living Response Plan (Appendix 1)**
- 2. delegate the amendments to the cost of living response plan to the lead officer (the Head of Environmental Health), in consultation with the Hub Lead Member;**
- 3. instruct officers to take immediate steps to progress support payments to families in receipt of Council Tax reduction as set out in 2.12 of this report.**

Executive summary

- 1.1 At the meeting of the Hub Committee on the 27th September 2022 it was resolved that Cllr Leech be appointed as lead member for responding to the Cost of Living. In addition, it was agreed that the Leader of the Council would lobby Government to increase funding to respond to the cost of living and finally that the Council would mobilise its available resources and with its partners ensure a responsive coordinated approach to the cost-of-living challenges faced by residents.
- 1.2 Appended to this report (Appendix A) is a draft response plan which sets out the actions the Council will take in relation to cost of living arranged under 3 priorities:
 - Direct support

- Working with partners & communities
 - Signposting and sharing information
- 1.3 The response plan will be a living document which will enable us to rapidly respond where additional support is required.

2. Background

- 2.1 The Government has announced an energy price cap on unit charges and daily standing charges. This will mean that an average household should pay no more than £2,500 per year for the next two years. This is in addition to the £400 energy support payment that will be awarded by energy suppliers. Separate support is available to businesses through the energy bill relief scheme.
- 2.2 Whilst these measures are welcomed, it is likely that there will be individuals and businesses who continue to struggle because of additional costs of living, and it is important that the Council stands ready to support where it can.
- 2.3 The draft response plan at Appendix A details how the Council will help residents and businesses get access to the support they need. While we are clear that we are unable to provide significant financial help universally, the Council has an important job as a signposter and enabler.
- 2.4 The Council is committed to ensuring any funding it is given to distribute to businesses and residents is done so at pace in the simplest way possible, as it has done in the past with the covid business support grants and the Homes for Ukraine thank you payments.
- 2.5 The 3 priorities of the action plan focus on:
- Direct Support - services the Council is able to deliver itself such as emergency grants, long term energy efficiency improvements, housing advice and benefit support. We will also commission services to support people with money advice to ensure they get every penny of entitlement and are able to manage their debts appropriately.
 - Working with partners, businesses & communities - services delivered by the voluntary and community sector are seeing an increase in demand for their support. This is not just traditional services providing advice on money, but also some of the hidden impacts such as domestic violence, youth homelessness and increased challenges for businesses.
 - Signposting and sharing information – the role of the Council in ensuring services for residents and businesses are well promoted and people have good access to specific information in a format appropriate to them
- 2.6 The action plan has a number of areas of focus and a timescale for delivery.

Council Tax rebate discretionary scheme

- 2.7 While the action plan sets out a number of actions to implement in the coming months, we can take immediate action to support families.
- 2.8 On the 7th June 2022 a report on the Council Tax rebate Discretionary Scheme was considered by Hub (minute HC.11/22 refers). The report stated that the fund would be available in two phases, phase one would be application based and phase two (the proposal to spend the remaining funds) would be presented back to the Hub Committee in November.
- 2.9 The Council wrote to eligible residents living in bands E-H properties and claiming Council Tax Reduction advising them to apply for a £150 payment. The Council also promoted through social media and their website that residents living in bands E-H properties and on a low income and people living in houses of multiple occupation were also eligible to apply for a £150 payment. To date we have received and paid 40 households totalling £6,000, leaving a balance of £104,550.
- 2.10 It is proposed that the remaining fund is used to support families in receipt of Council Tax Reduction (low income) via a direct payment in the form of a Post Office voucher.
- 2.11 The Council has (as at 29th September 2022) 777 families in receipt of Council Tax Reduction, 306 have 1 child, 471 have more than 1 child.
- 2.12 It is therefore proposed that Families with 1 child receive £90 and those with more than 1 child receive £160. This option would leave a balance of £1,650. Subject to Hub Committee agreement of this report, the payments would be made before the end of November 2022.
- 2.13 The remaining balance will be used for any online claims we receive from now until the end of November.

3. Outcomes/outputs

- 3.1 It is important that the Council is realistic in its ability to influence and intervene in what is becoming an international issue, and that it focuses on where it can support residents and businesses most. Getting government funding into the hands of people as quickly as possible is one of the key measures of success, and the Council has a positive track record in delivering in this area. There is also significant support already operating in the Borough and it is a key part of this action plan to join up wherever possible with these partners and deliver together where appropriate and promote other services whenever we can. Informing our residents of all the support available is where the Council can be instrumental.

4. Proposed Way Forward

- 5.1 That Hub Committee endorse the response plan at Appendix A and make any suggestions for areas for further inclusion
- 5.2 That Cllr Leech, as Lead Member for Cost of Living provides regular updates on progress through the Member Bulletin in

addition to updates through the Quarterly Integrated Performance Management report considered by Hub.

- 5.3 That the Council take immediate steps to process payments to families in receipt of Council Tax reduction, with £90 to families with one child and £160 to families with more than one child.

6. Implications

Implications	Relevant to proposals Y/N	Details and proposed measures to address
Legal/Governance	Y	It is intended that the action plan remains a working document and that as issues emerge, they can be added into the action plan on the agreement of the lead member. There are no direct legal or governance implications as a result of agreement to the plan.
Financial implications to include reference to value for money		The action plan as set out in Appendix A to this report includes a number of actions that have financial implications although not implications that will impact the Councils medium Term Financial Strategy.
Risk		The risk is in the Council not delivering a clear and co-ordinated action plan, resulting on a negative impact on our communities and the Council being seen as not responsive.
Supporting Corporate Strategy		Wellbeing Council Services Homes
Consultation and Engagement Strategy		Such has been the speed of the cost of living crisis, that no public consultation has been carried out on the draft response plan.
Climate Change - Carbon / Biodiversity Impact		None as a direct impact of this report.
Comprehensive Impact Assessment Implications		
Equality and Diversity		Equality impact assessment will be completed as projects are delivered
Safeguarding		None as a direct impact of this report, however some of the actions in the plan are designed to support interventions to help keep children and vulnerable adults safe.
Community Safety, Crime and Disorder		None as a direct impact of this report, however some of the actions in this plan are designed to support interventions to tackle crime such as domestic violence.

Health, Safety and Wellbeing		Financial wellbeing is crucial to the wellbeing of our residents. Actions within this plan are designed to support this
Other implications		

Supporting Information

Appendices:

Appendix A – Draft Response plan

Background Papers:

None