

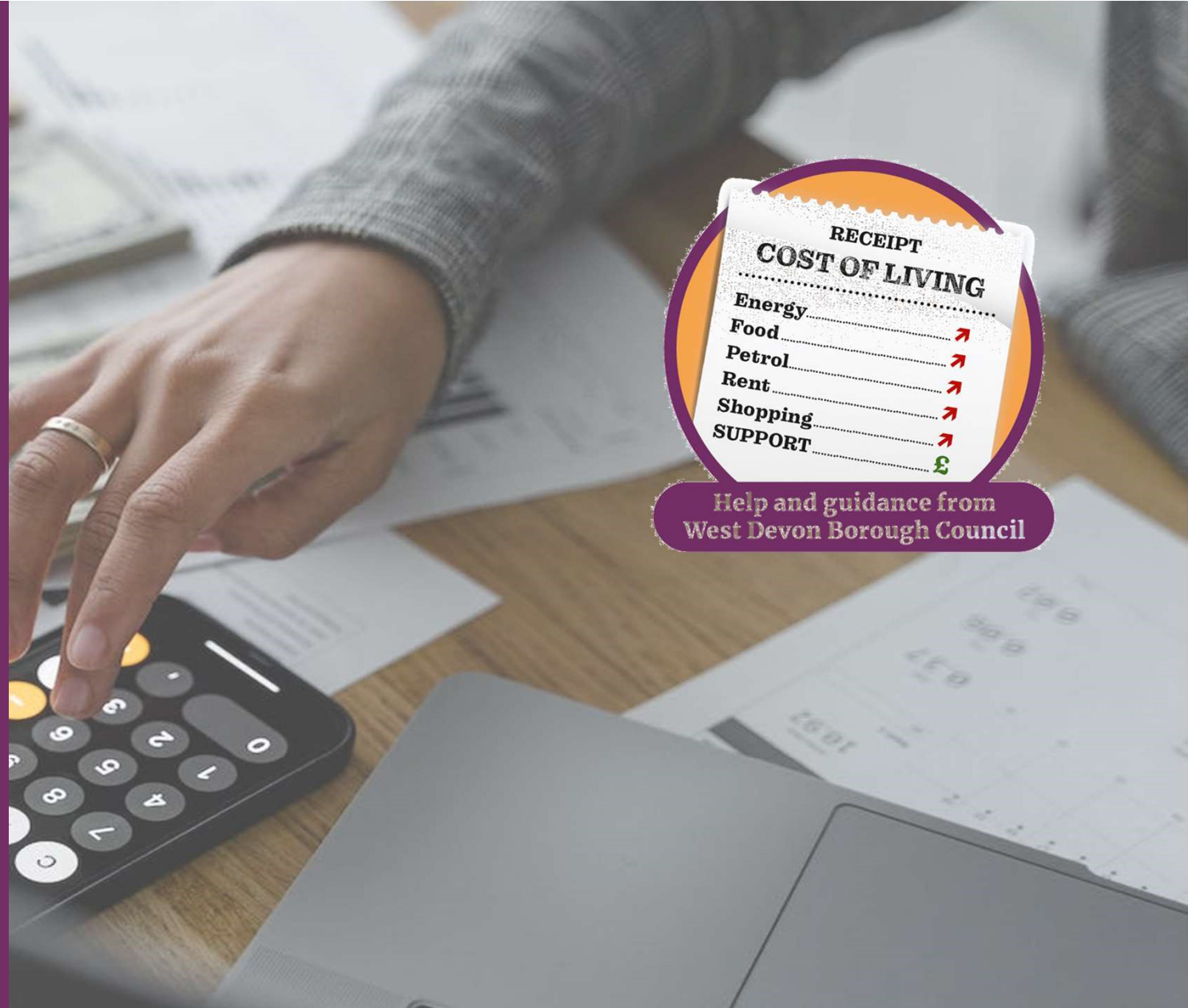


West Devon
Borough Council

Cost of Living Response Plan

November 2022

Supporting our Plan for
West Devon



Help and guidance from
West Devon Borough Council

Our Cost-of-Living Action Plan

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Between May 2021 – May 2022, food items increased 8.5%. Household food security does not only depend on food affordability, but also on the ability of consumers to physically access food shops – a challenge in some of our rural areas



The Impact of the cost of living in West Devon

The dramatic increase in the cost of living has already begun to have a significant impact on residents across the borough.

In April 2022, the energy unit price cap was increased by 54% and in August, inflation reached a 40-year high at 10.1%. These increases against a backdrop of recovering from the financial and health impacts of the global pandemic are likely to increase inequality and disproportionately affect the Borough's most deprived communities.

The following groups are likely to particularly affected

- Single people on low incomes (on benefits or in work)
- Families with children, including lone parents
- Those living with disabilities or complex health needs
- Pensioners

It is estimated from the latest figures in 2020 there were 3.1 million households in fuel poverty in England, with 3,100 being located in West Devon. In recent months, this number will have significantly increased.

While recent government energy cost support is welcomed, for many this will not go far enough to ensuring they can meet their essential needs through the coming months.

We also know that food insecurity is a concerns for many families in West Devon.

A 2021 Public Health survey of residents estimated that 17% of households were experiencing food insecurity – where the basic right of access to food is not being met. This is a particular issue here in West Devon, with the rural area and transport challenges meaning that people do not have as reliable access to affordable food options.

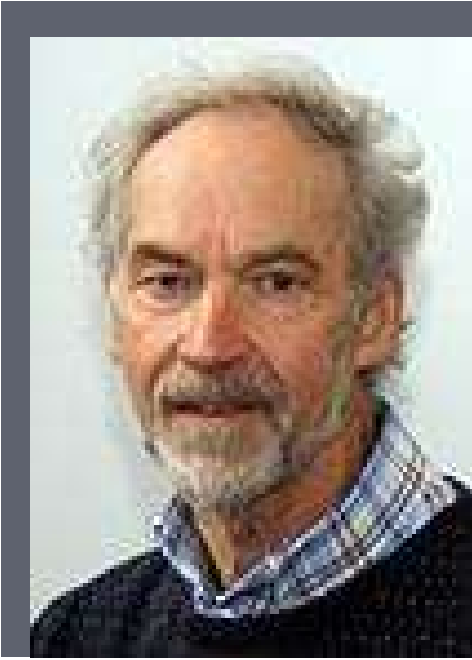
In 2021, West Devon CVS and South Hams CVS led analysis in to food insecurity which highlighted particular concern about in-work levels of poverty, where low wages and household outgoings do not allow for an adequate diet for family members.

As the cost of energy continues to increase, as well as less money being available to purchase food, there is a concern that the food options available are less nutritious and particularly as we enter colder months, people are less likely to access warm meals.

The Government have recently announced additional measures including capping the increase in energy prices for the next two years and so as well as setting out some immediate support, it is important we consider longer term measures to support our residents.

We know that as a Borough Council, we are not able to solve the cost of living issues currently faced by residents, but through this action plan we will work with partners and out communities to ensure everyone knows what support is available and how it can be accessed.





Our action plan to tackle the cost of living

The cost of living is now higher than at almost any time in living memory. We know that many residents are still recovering from the financial impacts of the global pandemic and now as we go into the Autumn and Winter, they are concerned about meeting their essential bills like heating and food.

We must now mobilise all of our resources to provide a joined up response to the increased cost of living. We will take steps to de-stigmatise accessing help and support, provide signposting so that our residents know where they can get help and work closely with partners who are on the frontline of supporting our residents through this particularly challenging time. While Government have already taken some steps to reduce the impact of the cost of living increases, there is more we must do. We will also lobby Government on a number of issues.

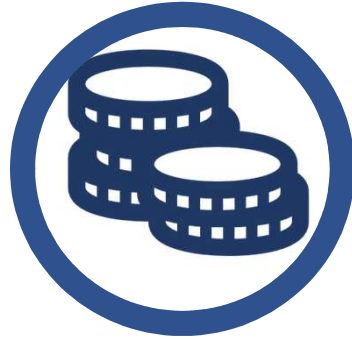
Through this action plan we set out a series of key commitments, and I will ensure that the Council staff all work to delivering on them to ensure that our residents are supported.

Cllr Tony Leech, Lead Member (Cost of Living)



Delivering on Cost of Living

Our aim is to ensure that every penny of support available to our residents can be accessed quickly and easily, that our residents have access to healthy nutritious food and that they are helped to navigate the complexities of the support available. To do this we'll ensure our resources are aligned to deliver the following three strands of activity.



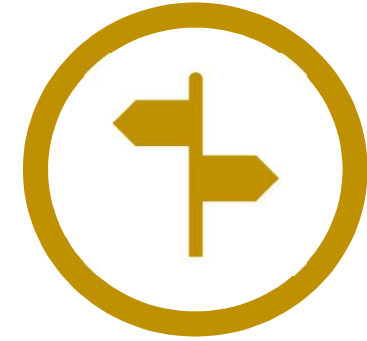
Direct Support

We'll ensure that support we directly provide is easy to access and quick to respond to the needs of our communities



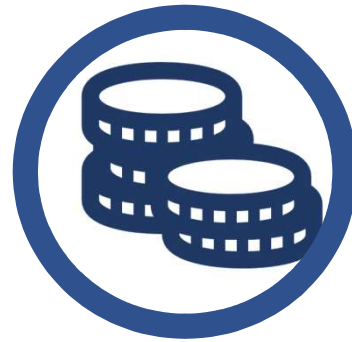
Working with partners and communities

We'll support the local communities who know their residents best by making funding available to support projects designed to combat the increases locally



Signposting and sharing information

We'll promote and help people to access information on existing support across the Borough.



Direct Support

We'll ensure we align our resources to best support our residents and to deliver targeted direct support ranging from emergency grants through to longer-term measures such as home insulation and switching to greener energy sources.

We know that most people do not want to come to the Council for support, so when they do, it's important that the process is simple and quick.

So far we have:-

- Supported 26,696 households through the Government energy bill rebate [scheme](#) (£150 per household)
- Launched a discretionary Council Tax rebate [scheme](#) for households not eligible for the main energy bill rebate
- Made one-off payments of £90 to pensioners in receipt of Council Tax reduction
- Awarded £747,019 in grants through the Green Homes Grant schemes

We will ensure that we continue to lobby Government for more funding to support energy improvements in homes. In 2020 we secured £1m of funding for this purpose, but to be able to do this in the 3,000 homes in the borough in fuel poverty, it is estimated £45-50m will be required.

We will ensure a package of direct support including:

Focus	Aims	Specific Actions	Timescale
Providing direct financial support to residents who need it	We will ensure that where direct support is available, it is easy to access and processed quickly. We aim that every penny of support due to residents is claimed by them.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide further targeted financial support to families with children who are in receipt of Council Tax reduction - £90 per family with one child, £160 for families with more than one child • Ensure Discretionary Housing Payment funding is utilised to support residents struggling with their rent. • Develop criteria and deliver on Household Support Fund (Round 3) – awaiting details but aiming for October 2022 • Increase capacity in Housing Service to offer options and advice to people at risk of homelessness (utilising government grant – temp accomm support workers) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • By November 2022 • Ongoing • October 2022
Delivering on schemes for improving energy efficiency of homes	It is important that in the medium/long term we support our residents with schemes that will enable them to use less energy in their homes through insulation, installation of greener energy sources and other efficiency improvements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deliver a communications campaign to highlight the home energy grants (such as green home grants and ECO4) available to our residents and ensure we have the capacity to meet the demand • Lobby Government for further grant funding to increase energy efficiency of properties across the borough particularly those in fuel poverty. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ongoing • Ongoing
Ensuring we provide direct support to businesses where possible	As a Council our role in supporting businesses is limited, however we will ensure that where we can, we will ensure all available support is delivered well.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delivery of a Covid additional restrictions fund scheme for businesses unable to access other support through the pandemic • Promotion of support and advice available to businesses through our existing contract with Business Information Point. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • November 2022 • Commencing in Business Support newsletter from November 2022



Working with partners and communities

We'll support the local communities who know their residents best by making funding available to support projects designed to combat the crisis locally

It is clear that helping our residents adapt to the increased cost of living will require support from a range of partners and voluntary sector organisations. We will listen to our communities and work with them to help them to help one another.

We are working closely with partners in order to meet the needs of our residents, this includes Citizens Advice, the Council for Voluntary Service (CVS) and the Money Advice Service. We will work even closer with them to ensure that they are able to meet the increasing demand for services.

We have already:-

- Continued to build on the positive community relationships developed through the global pandemic - working with key partners and community forums that are supporting the wellbeing of our residents
- Begun a pilot project to examine the causes of rural deprivation and the role of the Council in supporting our communities
- Held discussions with some key partners about increasing the funding we provide to them in order for them to meet the increasing demand for services

But we will do more and provide an even greater focus on developing partnerships that meet this specific challenge head on together.

We will work with our partners and communities by:

Focus	Aims	Specific Actions	Timescales
Supporting Increased community capacity	We know that there are many community organisations and partners supporting our residents with projects and schemes in response to the Cost-of-Living increases. We will support increase capacity within these vital functions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agree additional funding for Citizens Advice for the next two years • Work with partners to deliver a £25,000 grant fund for community groups delivering schemes responding to cost of living • Continue with extension to Money Advice Service – ensuring a 5 day a week service • Re-establish Community Network meetings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • By end November 2022 • Nov / Dec 2022 • Ongoing • October 2022
Playing an active part in existing community networks	There are already a significant number of highly effective community support networks in place, we will ensure that we play an active part in these networks and provide support where we can (where it is wanted)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to attend the CVS meetings (such as Tavistock and Okehampton Health and Wellbeing alliances) in order to listen to and understand local issues and identify where the Council may be able to help • Make council facilities available to local community groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ongoing • Ongoing
Working with partners to understand and respond to 'hidden impacts' of COL	The impacts of cost of living are not limited to financial . The financial impacts will result in a number of impacts – both short and longer term that we should take steps to address.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure the next iteration of our Corporate Strategy 'Plan for West Devon' responds to the longer-term impacts of cost of living 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Update for Year 3 delivery plan – March 2023



Signposting and sharing information

We'll promote and help people access information on existing support across the borough.

There are many organisations providing support to residents to meet the challenges of increased cost of living and many different grant and other support schemes available. A significant focus for the Council will be on ensuring a trusted and clear source of all available support schemes and organisations.

We will take steps to ensure we highlight all available support to our residents, making it easy for them to access the right support.

We have already:-

- Commenced (with partner agencies) weekly advertorials in local newspapers, highlighting specific support that is available – these will continue through the Autumn and Winter with a different focus each week
- Launched an online support directory setting out where residents can get help
- E-bulletins and social media campaigns

We will now go a stage further and ensure we explore a wider range of communication and signposting channels, further enhancing our online support directory and ensuring those not online are aware of the support available

We will ensure that all our residents are aware of the range of support available to them by:

Focus	Aims	Specific Actions	Timescales
Using a range of methods to reach out to residents and businesses	We know that not everyone uses social media, and some of our residents are not online (including some of our most vulnerable). We will aim to reach out to our residents through a number of different channels, ensure we reach as many as possible	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote support in local newspapers each week - starting September 2022, in partnership with other agencies Develop an updated 'Support' website using our new technology to make it even easier to navigate - by October 2022 Deliver messages on key support methods by using social media with clearly branded support. Posters for community notice boards with QR codes etc Launch a residents digital newsletter focused on Cost of Living and other key support available within the borough. Identify key community events and attend them to reach out to residents not online 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> September 2022 onwards End October 2022 Commencing Sept 2022 Ongoing
Ensuring our staff and Members are aware of the support available to our residents to that they can signpost accordingly	Building on the role of our dedicated 'Vulnerable Person Support Officer' we will ensure our teams have the right knowledge to signpost residents to available support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Briefing for contact centre and key frontline staff on support that is available – and ensure they can meet the demand. Train our frontline officers to ask the right questions Develop innovative ways for individuals to contact the Council seeking support Provide information for our Members to enable them to relay information to communities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ongoing
Ensuring that we also focus on promoting support for the 'hidden impacts' resulting through the cost of living increases	We know that the impacts will not stop at financial, the increased pressures will have impact on both the physical and mental wellbeing of our residents, particularly through the Autumn and winter months. We will ensure that in our planning we also focus on addressing these needs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Deliver on our commitments around wellbeing within the Plan for West Devon, including ensuring access to leisure centres, launching an additional Health and Wellbeing Grant scheme – following the success of last years scheme (£25,000) Work with the Community Safety Partnership to deliver Domestic Abuse awareness training to Council officers and voluntary sector organisations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Launch by end November 2022 Jan / Feb 2023

Resourcing our plans

As set out in the three delivery plans, the initial funding identified to support our plans is as follows.

Work strand	Discretionary Energy Rebate Scheme fund (£104,550 available)	DCC Covid-19 Hardship Fund (Opening Bal £72,234)	DCC Clinically Extremely Vulnerable fund (Opening Bal £84,792)	Detail
Additional grant to families in receipt of Council Tax reduction (£90 where one child, £160 where more than one child)	£102,900			From discretionary energy rebate scheme, must be spent by end November 2022
Continue with extension to Money Advice Services – from 3 days per week to 5 days per week to ensure demand can be met			£14,000	We increased this service through Covid-19 and demand continues to be high.
Increase in grant funding to Citizens Advice £10,000 per year for the next two years (as per Partnerships report)		£20,000		£20,000 from Covid 19 Hardship (W4177)
Provision of grants for community organisations responding specifically to the cost of living crisis such as establishing warm banks etc		£27,500		£25,000 plus administration for a partner organisation to deliver funds
Provision of grant funding for Community Wellbeing Schemes – including supporting mental health, isolation etc			£25,000	
Total	£102,900	£47,500	£39,000	£189,400

The above activities utilise existing grant funding and therefore do not impact on the Councils Medium Term Financial Strategy

