

DEPRIVATION WITHIN THE NEW FOREST

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

1.1 That the Cabinet recommends to Council that:-

- a) the scale of the national and local support measures in place to assist households that are most in need within the District, be noted;
- b) the existing cross-cutting work on-going within the Council and with partners to support those most in need, including those within the most deprived neighbourhoods in the District, continues;
- c) continued support to the Cost of Living Steering Group is provided, bringing a multi-agency approach to tackling issues affecting the most vulnerable in our community, working alongside the Local Partnership Campaign Manager to explore and promote further support to households.

2. INTRODUCTION

2.1 This paper has been produced for the Cabinet in response to Cllr Jack Davies' Motion to the Council in May 2022. The full motion is outlined below;

"This Council notes:

** The alarming news that 4 out of 114 neighbourhoods across the New Forest are in the top 20% most deprived neighbourhoods for income deprivation in England according to the 2019 Index of Multiple Deprivation.*

This Council further notes:

** The Cost of Living Crisis, which is expected to get worse, will push more local households into poverty.*

** That the cost of living crisis has a disproportionate effect on people in the most deprived neighbourhoods.*

** There are many different areas of deprivation included within the Index of Multiple Deprivation. These include: income deprivation; employment deprivation; education, skills, and training deprivation; health and disability deprivation; crime deprivation; income deprivation affecting children; income deprivation affecting older people; living environment deprivation; and housing deprivation.*

** There are two neighbourhoods within the New Forest which are in the top 20% most deprived neighbourhoods for income deprivation affecting children. These two neighbourhoods are contained within Butts Ash and Dibden Purlieu ward and Pennington ward respectively.*

This Council recommends:

1. A Task and Finish Group be set up to form a plan to tackle deprivation across the New Forest with a particular emphasis on the 4 most deprived neighbourhoods for income deprivation.

** That this Task and Finish Group reports to the Community, Partnerships and Wellbeing Overview and Scrutiny Panel.*

2. Overall Deprivation is included as a key priority within the Corporate Plan and include the responsibility for reducing overall deprivation within the priorities of the Portfolio Holder for Partnering and Wellbeing."

2.2 At the Council meeting, the Leader confirmed that the motion would be addressed through a report of the Cabinet, hence this paper.

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 The Index of Multiple Deprivation 2019 measures relative deprivation across small areas called Lower-layer Super Output Areas (LSOAs) – there are 32,844 of these areas across England, including 114 in the New Forest. An overall IMD score is based on seven different domains of deprivation which are summarised in the image below.

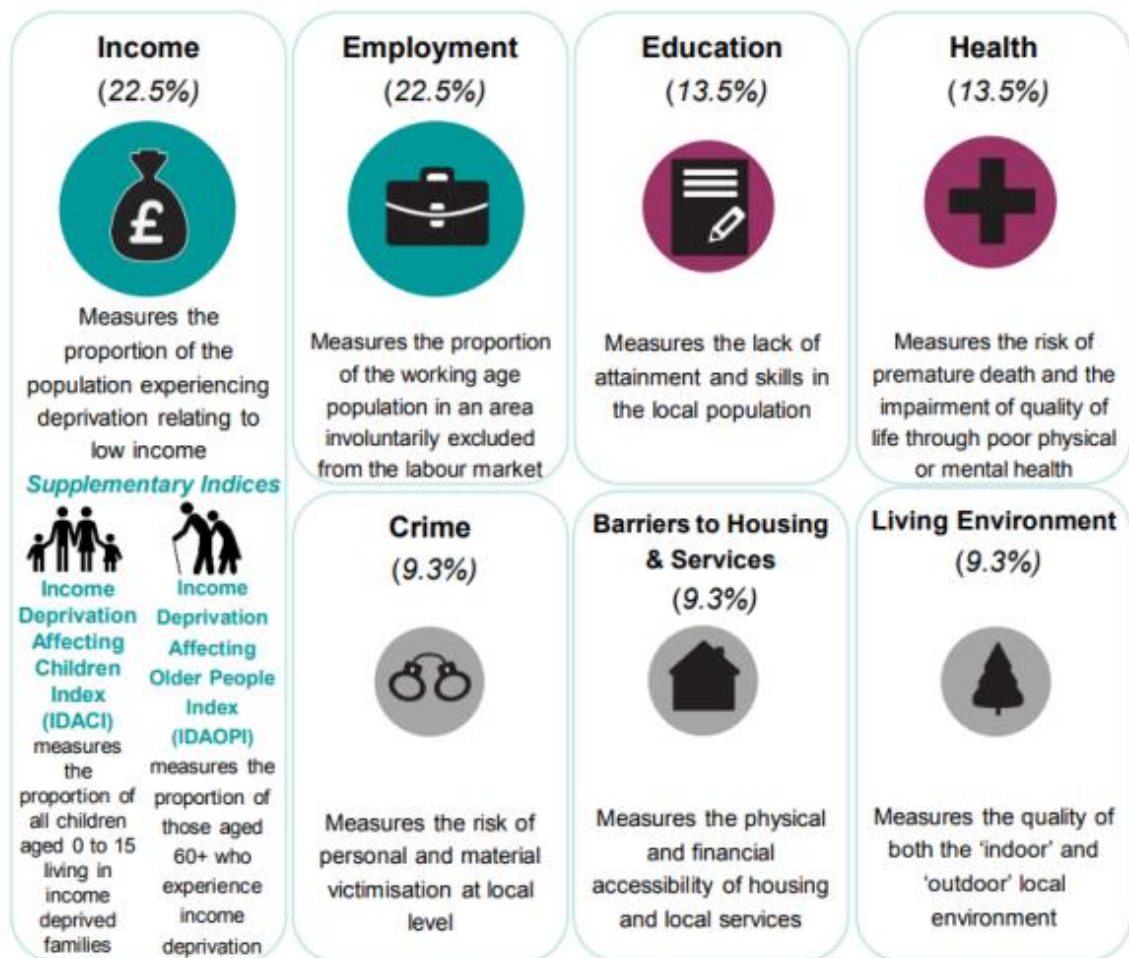
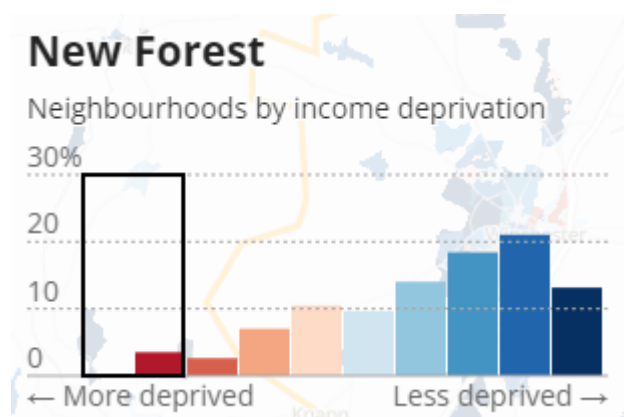


Image 1: IMD 2019 domains (weightings included in brackets)¹.

3.2 For average score, New Forest is ranked **245th most income-deprived**, where rank 1 is the most deprived, out of the 316 local authorities in England.



- 3.3 Of the 114 neighbourhoods in New Forest, 4 were amongst the 20% most income deprived. 39 were in the 20% least income deprived (ONS data).



- 3.4 To help identify trends across the Country, there are 4 income deprivation profiles. The New Forest is included within the 'less income deprived' cluster. Much of the rest of the south coast is included within the 'n' shaped profile, which includes neighbourhoods close to average levels of income deprivation.
- 3.5 The New Forest typically has low unemployment levels, but income when compared to cost of living represents a challenge. The Council must strive to further support households in work through targeting wage growth and the creation of additional employment opportunities. This requires a medium-long term strategic approach.

4. NATIONAL SUPPORT MEASURES

4.1 Universal Credit and welfare benefits

Universal Credit is a payment administered by the Department for Work and Pensions to support households with their living costs. It merges 6 state benefits into one, is paid monthly and is available to those on a low income, out of work or for those unable to work. The payment is made up of a standard allowance with extra amounts payable if the claimant has children, a disability or pays rent. For those in work there are work allowances and support towards helping with childcare costs and for those looking for work have dedicated Work Coaches provide support and advice and financial assistance, for example travel and clothing for interviews.

There are a range of state benefits available to support households, for example those with children, e.g. Child Benefit, disabilities, e.g. Personal Independence Payments, provide care, e.g. Carers Allowance, and for those of pension age on low income Pension Credit.

For those on a low income there is also support with free NHS prescriptions, dental treatment, eye tests and help with other NHS costs, e.g., travel.

In 2021/22 we administered £27.3m in Housing Benefit which supports households on a low income with paying their rent. The level of support is dependent on the circumstances of the household, with those renting from private landlords subject to the Local Housing Allowance which is set at the 30th percentile of market rents. The Benefit cap applies to households whose weekly award of state benefits exceeds £384.62 for couple and households with children or £257.69 for single claimants.

Working age claimants will be migrated to Universal Credit from 2024, and we will work with our partners on this migration to support our most vulnerable households.

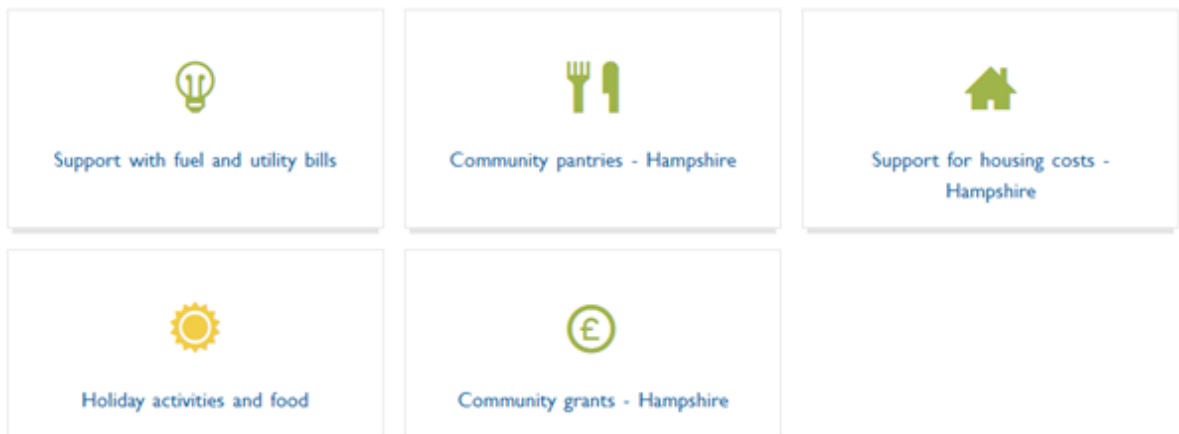
4.2 Household Support Fund (NFDC and HCC (connect for communities))

The Council distributed £90,000 in 2021/22 to 232 households. The funding was used to support vulnerable households in a variety of ways, including with rent arrears and essential household items, with award values dependent on the household circumstances.

The government have announced further funding from April 2022 with an emphasis on utilising one-third of the funding to support pensioners, one-third to support families and one-third for other groups, which could include pensioners and families. Further detailed information on this support, including food vouchers, is included elsewhere on the Cabinet agenda.

Hampshire County Council have launched the 'Connect4communities' programme, which aims to support those most in need with significantly rising living costs, particularly families with children and pensioners who would otherwise struggle with energy, food and water bills.

Projects



Any resident suffering financial hardship is encouraged to have a look at the following websites and get in touch with the County Council, or NFDC;

www.hants.gov.uk/socialcareandhealth/childrenandfamilies/connectforcommunities

www.newforest.gov.uk/article/2964/Household-Support-Fund

Or email:

Connect4communities@hants.gov.uk / benefits@NFDC.gov.uk

4.3 Energy Rebate Scheme

Covered in more detail elsewhere on this Cabinet agenda, the Energy Rebate Scheme has already seen the Council distribute over £7.5M in £150 cash payments to households living in band A-D properties.

The Council aims to launch its discretionary scheme by the end of June and will distribute the available funding of £320,850 as soon as practicably possible.

4.4 Energy Bills Discount and Financial Support linked to Increasing Cost of Utilities

The chancellor confirmed (May 2022) that every household will receive a £400 discount on energy bills. Millions of pensioner households will also receive a £300 payment to help with energy costs. Millions on Universal Credit and other means-tested benefits will also receive a £650 one-off payment. There is also the Warm Homes Discount scheme where those eligible on a low income will receive £140 and claimants in receipt of a disability benefit will receive £150 payment.

5. **LEVELLING UP / COUNTY DEAL**

5.1 The fundamental principal of the levelling up agenda is to tackle regional and local inequalities. The 4 medium term missions, to be periodically reviewed the government, set out the ambitions of the programme to:

- i. Boost productivity, pay, jobs and living standards by growing the private sector, especially in those places where they are lagging
- ii. Spread opportunities and improve public services, especially in those places where they are weakest
- iii. Restore a sense of community, local pride and belonging, especially in those places where they have been lost
- iv. Empower local leaders and communities, especially in those places lacking local agency

5.2 The £2.6bn UK Shared Prosperity Fund is to be used to restore local pride across the UK and focuses investment on three main areas for investment:

- improving communities and place,
- people and skills, and
- supporting local business.

5.3 It is for local authorities to determine how and where this Prosperity funding is allocated and spent across the 3 financial years 22/23 – 24/25. The District Council's proposal will be coming forward at the end of July, in line with the mandated timeline. As a key objective, we will aim to utilise these funds to leverage further funds beyond the period covered by the fund to ensure the funding make a sustained difference to the communities within the District.

5.4 The objectives of a pan-Hampshire County deal are to improve the lives of our residents, boost sectors and productivity, and generate net environmental gain and support net zero transition. As a contributor to Levelling up, a pan-Hampshire deal is aiming to;

- Grow our economy to help support and fund levelling up across the UK
- Build on our sector and innovation strengths to drive up productivity
- Connect our more deprived communities to job opportunities through transport interventions

5.5 The Council is engaged with the Levelling up agenda. We are developing a business case to spend the £1m of UK Shared Prosperity Fund that we have been allocated. We're actively engaging with the County Council on a pan-Hampshire deal that protects the sovereignty of this Council, whilst providing significant added benefits to our residents.

6. SOLENT FREEPORT

6.1 As reported to the Council in March '22;

Freeports are a flagship HM Government programme that play an important part in the UK's post-Covid and post-Brexit economic recovery. Their aim is to contribute to the Government's levelling up agenda by bringing jobs, investment and high value opportunities including to some of the most deprived communities across the country, while at the same time, generating national benefits through trade and innovation.

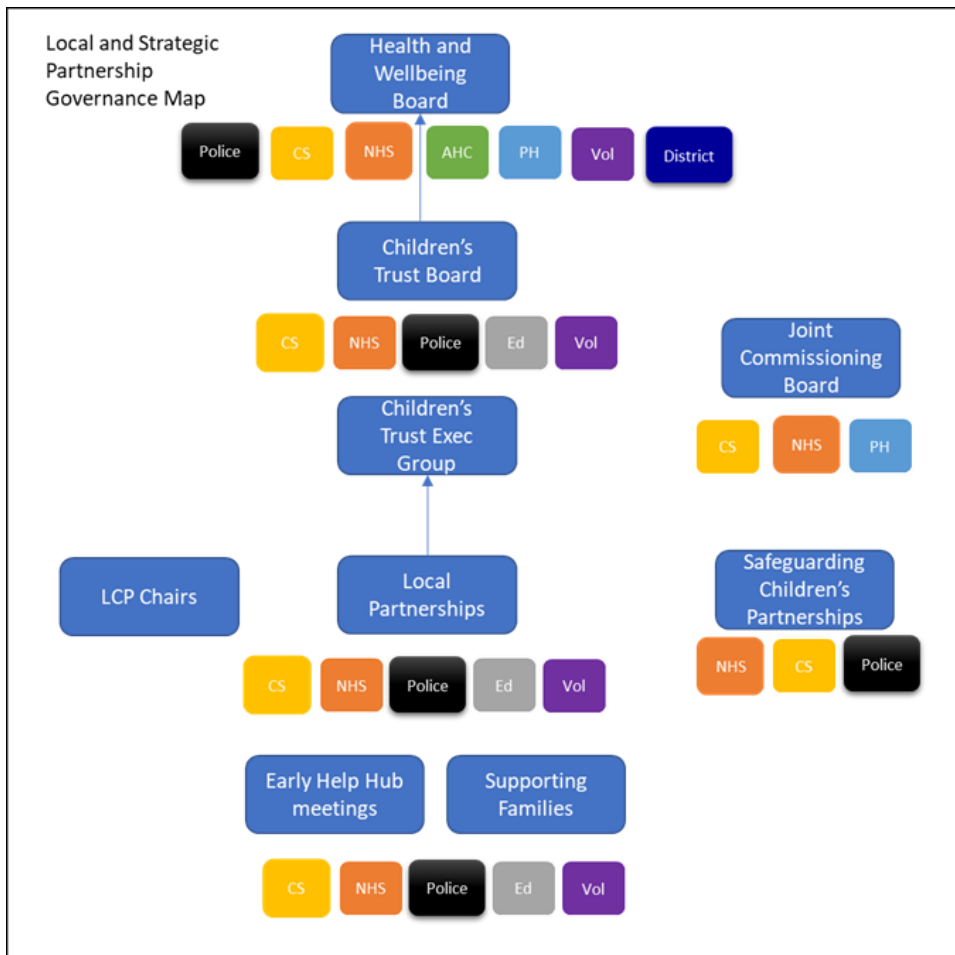
6.2 The Solent Freeport Full Business Case has been submitted, and legislation laid to designate tax and customs sites. Growth at both Fawley and Marchwood Port provide the opportunity to deliver much needed additional employment floorspace within the District and provide real opportunity for residents to access training and job opportunities within a local area.

6.3 Meetings have taken place with two Colleges located within the New Forest, and it's extremely pleasing to note that they are both very engaged with the Solent Freeport project and are already planning how to target education provision to fit in with end-user requirements.

7. LOCAL SUPPORT MEASURES

7.1 Hampshire County Council

HCC coordinate the Early Help Hub and the Supporting Families programme which brings various organisations together to discuss and support our most vulnerable households with children. This covers a range of issues such as mental health, education, unemployment, domestic abuse, and financial hardship. There is also a Health and Wellbeing board and Children's Trust Board to enhance partnership working and share local information, deliver local priorities and identify gaps in provision and training.



7.2 Local Children's Partnership

The Council is a member of the Local Children's Partnership. The partnership is part of a wider network of LCPs across the county and links to the Hampshire Children's Trust. The Local Children's Partnership brings together local community, statutory and voluntary sectors to look at the issues faced by children and young people in the district and identify opportunities to tackle those issues. This group looks to support the most vulnerable members of the local community.

7.3 Discretionary Housing Payments

Where a resident is in receipt of Housing Benefit or the Housing element of Universal credit, and there is a shortfall between the amount awarded which is causing exceptional financial hardship, we have discretion to award a Discretionary Housing Payment. Awards are usually short term and subject to limited funding.

7.4 Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme

The Council's Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme helps to protect the most vulnerable by offering support for those on a low income towards paying council tax. There are currently 7,915 households receiving Council Tax Reduction, with the level of support dependent on individual circumstances. The Council has discretion for working age claimants, but the level of support for pension age households is prescribed by a national scheme.

7.5 Exceptional Hardship Payment Scheme

Where a claimant is in receipt of Council Tax Reduction, still has an amount of council tax to pay, and is in financial hardship, the Council has discretion to award an Exceptional Hardship Payment.

7.6 Food Larders

In partnership with FareShare, Food Banks and Citizens Advice New Forest, 10 Food Larders have been set-up across the district to support those on a low income with making their money go further. Outreach advice and information is available, and we are keen to develop this to further support communities.

7.7 Housing Tenancy Management & Support

Our Tenancy Account Team support our tenants by maximising their income and signposting, e.g., entitlement to state benefits, referrals to partner organisations, e.g., food banks, help with form completion, e.g., Council Tax Support, have a dedicated Floating Support Worker who visits vulnerable households.

We work closely with tenants in rent arrears to sustain their tenancy.

7.8 Community Grants Scheme

The revenue and capital grant sums of £130,000 and £100,000 respectively are made available through the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan, with overview and scrutiny provided through the Community and Partnership panel. These grants support a range of organisations providing a range of service that support our communities, e.g. mental health, low income, and those with a disability and grants for 2022/23 gave priority to those groups supporting residents impacted by the pandemic. Individual Councillors also have £600 available annually (£1,000 in 2022/23) to support local priorities and initiatives within their ward.

The Council could consider whether this funding is being targeted in the right places, or whether this financial support could be refocused to provide hardship support on a more tailored basis. **The Community Grants Task and Finish Group will be asked to consider this in their initial meeting, due to take place in Summer 2022.**

7.9 Health & Wellbeing Delivery Plan

The Council's emerging health & wellbeing delivery plan identifies and addresses the clear link between deprivation and health inequalities. It advocates a whole system approach to tackling the wider determinants of health to improve the physical and mental wellbeing of the most vulnerable residents. This delivery plan looks to engage with partners and the local community and work with them to ensure an asset-based community development approach, empowering them to create sustainable change.

7.10 Supporting the Voluntary Sector

i. Funding Agreement with Citizens Advice New Forest

The Council has a 3 year Funding Agreement with Citizens Advice New Forest (CANF) who provide free and independent advice and information, as well as providing outreach support at Food Larders. We have provided additional support to fund a Debt Supervisor for 2 years to build up resilience with debt advice within their service to support our residents with money problems (see Cabinet report dated 6

April 2022). As part of the Household Support Fund allocation, CANF are responsible for administering fuel vouchers of £150 for those in financial hardship.

We work closely with CANF, referring residents in need of advice and information, review performance and have an Officer and Councillor presence at board meetings.

ii. Community First Wessex

Through our annual community grants programme, we have provided funding to Community First Wessex (CFW) who work with and support the voluntary sector.

In partnership with Hampshire County Council, we provide funding towards community transport schemes, administered by CFW that support residents and groups.

CFW supported the Council in our response to the pandemic and we are keen to formalise our partnership with a Service Level Agreement. **The Community Grants Task and Finish Group will be asked to consider this in their initial meeting, due to take place in Summer 2022.**

iii. Working with partners

We actively work with a range of partners to support communities and attend monthly networking meetings to discuss issues, promotion of initiatives and schemes, funding opportunities and joint working. Referrals are made between organisations, for example for debt advice, foodbank parcels, fuel bank vouchers, disability and support.

Within our local voluntary sector they have a referral system to refer customer information, with their consent, to relevant partners who can provide further advice, information and support and ensure customer contact is maintained.

7.11 Cost of Living

Working in partnership with Citizens Advice New Forest, Community First Wessex, Ringwood and Waterside Foodbanks, New Forest Basics Bank, Youth and Families Matter, and Southampton University, this project analysed the impact on foodbank usage. The aims of the steering group were to:

- Review the socio-economic differences between areas
- Collect data to describe the cost of living and challenges to live comfortably on a low income
- Prepare a register of available services that support residents in the New Forest facing food and fuel poverty
- Provide recommendations to improve the quality of life for people in the New Forest on low incomes

The report highlighted several key findings including transport costs, affordable housing, the impact on mental health, childcare, employment opportunities and identified support and recommendations including mobile welfare and debt advice services, community resources, central listings that are widely accessible and a working group to review the report findings and agree a way forward.

Funding has been secured for 3 years to employ a Local Partnership Campaign Manager who will review the contents of the report, raise awareness, and work with partners to develop and implement an action plan to support our communities.

7.12 Advice and information

When communicating with residents we promote support available, give advice and information, signpost and refer to other organisations, and maximise income, for example entitlement to state benefits. For those in arrears we apply a Breathing Space period.

7.13 Arts and Culture

The Council is involved in a number of projects that is looking to engage with communities that are the least engaged. This includes those communities that are most vulnerable and looks to create an asset based community development approach, working with the communities rather than “doing to” them. This looks to harness the benefits of arts and culture in improving communities and place, supporting regeneration and empowering individuals.

8. RESIDENT SURVEY 2022

- 8.1 The Council is planning to undertake a resident survey in the Autumn (2022). This survey will be demographically targeted, to ensure results reflect an appropriate and proportionate split of area and age profiling across the District.
- 8.2 The survey will be used to help inform and shape the future Council Corporate Plan. It will also enable results to be broken down into specific areas, meaning nuances in specific areas will be picked up on. The survey is currently being designed and will be shared via a meeting of the Cabinet before it is launched.

9. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 The Council will continue to meet the administration of local and national support measures within existing budgets.
- 9.2 We will also seek to maximise opportunities through the retained business rates associated with the Solent Freeport to increase job opportunities and wage levels for residents across the District.
- 9.3 The Medium term financial position allows for ongoing funds to support communities. The way in which this funding is used and distributed could be re-shaped; opportunities for increased funding through the Council’s own General Fund is limited in the context of a significant budget deficit forecast over the medium term.

10. CRIME & DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 Deprivation is influenced by a number of social factors including employment, accommodation and health. Rising cost of living can be an influencer on the commissioning of acquisitive crimes such as theft.
- 10.2 The British Crime Survey (BCS) and police recorded crime data indicate that crime is not evenly distributed across England and Wales. Reports from the BCS found that the risk of being a victim of any household crime was higher in the most deprived areas compared with the least deprived areas in England.

11. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

11.1 There are none directly arising from this report.

12. EQUALITY & DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

12.1 Deprivation indices highlight inequalities of living standards across neighbourhoods within the New Forest District. The work that is on-going within the District to support those households most in need will have a positive impact and will help to address such inequality.

13. PORTFOLIO HOLDER COMMENTS

13.1 Overall, the New Forest is one of the least deprived local authority areas within England, however this statistic is of no comfort to those of our residents that are struggling to make ends meet. As the report sets out, despite the District as a whole performing comparatively well statistically, 4 of the 114 neighbourhoods are within the most deprived 20% in England and there are undoubtedly families and individuals within every Ward that are struggling, especially with the rising cost of living. This report details the help and support that is available to residents, delivered by this Council, local partners and national Government. While there is significant support available, we must do more, working with partners, to ensure our residents are aware of and can readily access these services. Furthermore, we must continue to work to provide long-term solutions by ensuring access to high quality education, training and employment opportunities across our District.

For further information contact:

Alan Bethune
Executive Head – Financial and Corporate Services
Section 151 Officer
023 8028 5001
alan.bethune@nfdc.gov.uk

Background Papers: