

## **SUPPORTING OUR RESIDENTS ACTION PLAN TO 2025**

### **1. RECOMMENDATIONS**

1.1 That the Panel support the Action Plan, attached as Appendix 1.

### **2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

2.1 Many households have been affected by the rising cost of living, including increased utility, fuel, and food bills, resulting in households continuing to struggle to pay and keep up with their bill payments.

2.2 In response, and recognising the financial pressures impacting an increasingly wide proportion of the population, a Council wide group was formed with representatives, including officers from Housing, Benefits, Information Offices, Communications, and Economic Development, to coordinate, engage, consider, and communicate our approach and what activities and initiatives we are undertaking, and could take, to support our residents who are affected by the cost of living.

2.3 The purpose of the group is to:

1. increase awareness amongst teams of the types of support available so that advice and information can be given to households and early intervention
2. share good practice and ideas
3. share resident insight to help understand the issues and consider responses
4. maintain a dedicated webpage with advice and information to support households and partners supporting households
5. provide continued and comprehensive communications to promote advice, information, and support to households, including local and national schemes and targeted topics, through various channels, including social media, Information Offices, letters, regular resident emails, and notices.
6. proactively administer government support schemes and utilise discretionary funding by working with partners, both internal and external
7. work with partner organisations to support households to signpost and refer households in need of support

2.4 The group, coordinated by the Service Manager Revenue, Benefits and Customer Services, meet regularly to provide updates and to discuss the points above in 2.3.

### **3. THE ACTION PLAN**

3.1 As a group, numerous actions and initiatives were discussed and agreed to support households with debt, tackling food and fuel poverty, wellbeing, and housing related poverty. These are considered under 5 key themes:

1. Supporting people on low incomes to maximise their income and minimise costs
2. Strengthening families and communities
3. Promoting employment opportunities
4. Addressing the high cost of housing and improving housing conditions

## 5. Improving the health and wellbeing for people on low incomes

- 3.2 The Action Plan, as detailed in Appendix 1, collates all the numerous activities being undertaken and the planned future initiatives. The Action Plan is a live document, being regularly updated to include new activities and initiatives as they arise.
- 3.3 The Action Plan is supported by various other strategies, for example the Health and Wellbeing Strategy.
- 3.4 The Action Plan supports the emerging Corporate Plan to “*Helping those in our community with the greatest need.*”

## 4. WORKING WITH PARTNERS

- 4.1 In partnership between Citizens Advice New Forest and Southampton University a report was commissioned in 2020 to research and highlight the impact of the cost of living in the New Forest. Although some of the findings are well publicised, for example high rents and a lack of transport in rural areas, the report did highlight the difference in prices between local shops (for example Express) and larger supermarkets.
- 4.2 In response to the report a Cost of Living Steering Group was established to consider how partners can work together to support households. The Group comprises of Citizens Advice New Forest, Southampton University, Community First, Food banks and Youth and Families Matter.
- 4.3 With subsequent funding from the Trussell Trust, a Partnership Campaigns Manager is employed to coordinate and develop an Action Plan, linked to researching the issues and developing campaigns to influence policies, both locally and nationally. Similar roles are employed across the country.
- 4.4 We are actively supporting and working with the Steering Group. Our Action Plan broadly reflects the objectives of the Steering Group.
- 4.5 We have also worked very closely with key partners, including Citizens Advice New Forest, on various initiatives to support households. The Service Manager Revenue, Benefits and Customer Services chairs a bi-monthly New Forest Partnership meeting which brings together numerous organisations to discuss and promote the support available to households across the district and to discuss opportunities to work together and share information.
- 4.6 Since setting up the weekly Food Larders in partnership with Fare Share at 11 locations across the district, we have developed five community hubs to provide in person advice, information, and support to residents, with attendance from our Benefits and Housing teams, as well partner organisations.

## 5. CONCLUSION

- 5.1 This report highlights the work of the Council wide Cost of Living Group, working together on the Action Plan which details the range activities and initiatives being proactively undertaken to support our households across the district affected by the cost of living. The Action Plan is regularly reviewed and updated to reflect any new activities being undertaken and we are collaboratively working with our partners to promote, signpost and support vulnerable households to ensure we “get the message out there” of what support is available.

## **6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 There are no financial implications as any financial support provided to households is fully funded from government grants.

## **7. CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATION**

- 7.1 There are no crime and disorder implications.

## **8. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATION**

- 8.1 The Action Plan supports initiatives which promote positive environmental impacts.

## **9. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS**

- 9.1 This Action Plan seeks to support vulnerable households across the district, providing additional support where residents are vulnerable, for example assisting with completing application forms and actively working with partner organisations.

### **For further information contact:**

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### **Background Papers:**

Supporting our Residents Action  
Plan