
Report to West Sussex Health and Wellbeing Board

26 January 2023

West Sussex County Council's Communities Directorate update on whole Council response to cost of living pressures

Report by Emily King, Assistant Director (Communities), West Sussex County Council

Summary

This report provides an update to the Board on action being taken by West Sussex County Council's Communities Directorate to mitigate the impacts of cost of living pressures on the health and wellbeing of the West Sussex population. The report focuses on activity supporting residents facilitated via the Communities Directorate, including our response to residents and activity via Libraries and the Community Hub, and reflects our whole Council approach.

Recommendation to the Board

The Health and Wellbeing Board is asked to:

- (1) Note the contents of this report.
 - (2) Identify opportunities to work collaboratively, as key systems leaders across West Sussex, to mitigate potential adverse impacts of cost of living pressures on our local population.
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Relevance to [Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy](#)

This report provides an update on the actions of the Council's Communities Directorate to mitigate the impact of cost of living (COL) pressures on health and wellbeing across the life course through working together across the County Council and with partners. These activities address the JHWS goals of Starting Well, Living and Working Well, and Ageing Well, and the principles agreed in the COL addendum, to: work in partnership; maximise the benefit of existing services; optimise our use of data and intelligence; and utilise community insight.

1 Background and context

1.1 The Health and Wellbeing Board discussed the impact of COL pressures on the health of the West Sussex population at their November 2022 meeting, and considered the impact of COL pressures on the local population's health and health inequalities. The proposed strategic approach and principles were agreed. This report provides a snapshot of current West Sussex County Council (WSSCC) activities from the perspective of the Communities Directorate, building on the verbal update from the Assistant Director (Communities) at the November meeting.

1.2 The update reflects the context of the whole Council approach to responding to COL pressures led by the Communities directorate. This approach includes

collaborative working across directorates, drawing on knowledge and skills from different teams, having one point of contact for partnership engagement, and making best use of resources to deliver joint activities and our offer of community-based support for residents.

1.3 In common with other organisations delivering services in the current context, WSCC is seeing the impact of COL pressures on people who use our services, including older people, children and families. Business as usual services are adapting to respond to this and to meet additional needs across multiple areas of Council business. The Council response to changes in demand and support to existing clients through core services and functions is not specifically included in this report.

1.4 The Council is developing tactical, coordinated community-based support through the Communities Directorate, led by the Assistant Director (Communities), to provide additional support to residents most in need. An internal officer group has been convened to co-ordinate and support the whole Council approach to delivery of the community-based response and activities with partners, set out below. The group includes representation from across the Council, including the Communities directorate (Community Hub, Partnerships, Libraries, Prevention Assessment Teams), Performance and Intelligence, Public Health and Communications, and is accountable to the Assistant Director (Communities).

1.5 The delivery approach is aligned with the JHWS COL addendum principles, including through working in partnership with Districts and Boroughs (D&Bs) and Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) organisations.

2 Update

2.1. Work in partnership:

2.1.1. Partnership relationships (see Appendix 1 for activities and outputs)

The Council has invested in key posts to support internal and external collaborative working in the Communities Directorate's COL response. West Sussex Public Health is funding a 12-month Public Health Lead role within the Communities Directorate, which is supporting joint working across Public Health and Communities. The Public Health Lead contributes specialist, evidence-based, public health advice and guidance to the COL response, and works closely with the Partnerships and Communities Manager.

The Partnerships and Communities Manager and team lead on relationships with D&Bs and VCSE partners to enable close collaborative working as the basis for the COL response. The role engages with D&B leads and provides a single point of contact and consistent attendance at key local COL meetings. This enables good communications, engagement and support to key partners. Good working relations have been created with VCSE organisations, e.g. Citizens Advice delivery of Government support grants and Sussex Community Foundation small grants to support the voluntary sector.

2.1.2. Communications (see Appendix 2 for activities and outputs)

Our COL campaign, Here to help – advice and practical support with COL, launched in October 2022 with the aim of supporting our most vulnerable residents by ensuring residents are aware of, and can engage with, local and national support services and offers. The campaign brings together information from different Council/partner services, with a focus on partnership working to ensure consistent messaging.

Key messaging focuses on the three contact points for residents with the County Council; the warm welcome in Libraries, our Community Hub, and our online COL campaign and advice pages. COL campaign pages were developed with D&B and VCSE support to cross-promote offers such as council tax relief, and avoid duplication. Key messages have included signposting to mental health support and income maximisation through encouraging take up of central government schemes and benefits, such as the Warmer Homes grant, social tariffs, and pension credit. Fire safety messages have also been linked to the campaign.

2.1.3. UK Harvest food rescue pilot (see Appendix 3 for activities and outputs)

WSCC is working with UK Harvest, D&Bs and local partners to pilot community food hubs for six months in Bognor Regis, Crawley (Broadfield area), and Southwick. The pilot is led by the Waste Prevention team with Partnerships team support, and was initiated before the COL response but has been brought into alignment due to wider opportunities. At the community food hubs, people are able to pick up a wide selection of surplus foods which would have otherwise ended up as waste from suppliers for a small financial donation. The hubs are also holding education sessions to help people reduce their food waste and save money, for example by using up leftovers, batch cooking, or using a slow cooker.

2.2 **Maximise the benefit of existing services:**

2.2.1. Information and advice services (see para 2.4.1 for service insights)

Information and advice (I+A) services are commissioned by the Council and D&B partners from Citizens Advice West Sussex and Age UK. The services seek to generate income for clients through supporting benefit claims and financial awards e.g. pension credit. The impact of COL pressures has been felt directly by these services, including increased demand and complexity. I+A services have a central role in the COL response for all residents and support other community-based activities such as income maximisation and communications, as well as providing community insight.

Two COL client groups have been identified: clients newly experiencing changes to income due to change in circumstances and/or rising costs; and clients already struggling, who are more likely to have a permanent health condition or be in receipt of benefits. As demand and complexity of client needs are increasing, I+A services are taking more flexible approaches to reach vulnerable residents and accommodate the time and resource requirements needed to address and resolve client issues.

2.2.2. Libraries

WSCC Libraries have been supporting residents experiencing COL pressures as an integral part of their business as usual activity: providing an information, enquiry and signposting service; offering books, leaflets and online resources on relevant topics; delivering an events/activities programme for targeted audiences; and providing access to partner services (e.g. Citizens Advice). Our network of 36 Libraries is supporting people experiencing hygiene poverty through distribution of essential toiletries packs. Targeted promotion enabled households most in need to benefit, particularly pensioners, disabled people, carers and families with young children. Around 2000 packs were successfully distributed before Christmas. The model will be repeated with an initiative to support individuals experiencing period poverty.

2.2.3. Community Hub and Household Support Fund round 3 (HSF3)

The Community Hub remains available for residents, providing support with COL and HSF3. Skilled advisors provide information, advice, guidance, signposting and practical support, resolving issues where possible, and signposting internal/external services and support when needed. HSF3 funding from national government runs until 31 March 2023; WSCC was allocated £4.8 million. Funding criteria apply with a focus on households in the most need, particularly those who may not be eligible for other government support, including families with children, pensioners, unpaid carers, care leavers and people with disabilities.

Distribution of funds for the first 3 months has seen at least 26,256 households provided with support via the Household Support Fund 3. Data on the support provided in the current period is in Appendix 4.

2.3 Optimise our use of data and intelligence:

2.3.1. Targeted household-level income maximisation using LIFT platform

WSCC is working collaboratively with D&Bs to take a targeted approach to supporting the most vulnerable households through income maximisation, which increases money coming into the household. This will involve identifying vulnerable households using data on household characteristics, and delivering targeted interventions and support. Several D&Bs e.g. Adur and Worthing, have established programmes using the Low Income Family Tracker (LIFT) platform. LIFT combines multiple local authority data sets to provide a holistic view of low income families, and displays data on household characteristics including financial resilience categorisation. WSCC will learn from D&B experiences and work together for maximum impact.

The Council will utilise the LIFT platform and develop an approach to using LIFT with D&Bs. This will include developing the WSCC support offer to households, ensuring it aligns with the Council's remit as an upper tier local authority and adds value to the D&B approach. Taking a coordinated approach will be key to ensure the most appropriate organisation contacts households, and to prevent duplication.

2.4. Utilise community insight:

2.4.1. Insights from partners are informing the wider COL response - for example, insights from Information and Advice services are shaping communications priorities, signposting, and the income maximisation approach. Key insights include:

- Majority of enquiries are income-related and benefits dominates; all include COL;
- Advisors report clients are expressing anxiety and increasing distress;
- Deficit personal budgets – even after maximising income and debt management there may not be enough money to meet day to day costs;
- Clients whose financial position is above benefit thresholds but vulnerable to COL;
- Clients with a health or disability need are experiencing greater COL impact;
- 'Clients in crisis' indicators e.g. needing emergency food support are increasing;
- Clients are cancelling essentials, including e.g. care alarms, dementia clubs etc making people more isolated and potentially at risk.

2.4.2 WSCC Communities Directorate will continue to work in partnership to deliver community-based actions to mitigate the impact of COL pressures on residents' health and wellbeing through a whole Council approach. Priorities in coming months include delivery of the remainder of HSF3 through the Community Hub and with partners, the development of our income maximisation approach and exploring further potential opportunities, for example, small grants, to support voluntary and community sector

organisations across the county. We will continue to work in partnership with D&Bs and VCSE organisations, including in our comms approach, and would welcome contact from partners about collaborative working across the system to mitigate the adverse impacts of cost of living pressures on the health and wellbeing of our local population.

Contact: Kate Birrell, Public Health Lead (Communities), WSCC,
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Appendix 1: Partnership relationships – activities and outputs

Key activities and outputs to date:

- Coordination of D&B involvement in Household Support Fund delivery for white goods and food vouchers, plus offer to food banks for energy vouchers distribution.
- Collaborative delivery of information, advice and clear communications to signpost residents, including Libraries as warm spaces, and sharing same information on websites.
- Attendance at District & Borough Strategic Leads Meetings (monthly).
- WSCC attendance at strategic and tactical cost of living meetings in D&B areas.
- Attendance at Local Community Network leads meetings on a monthly basis with COL a priority for all, and meetings over the winter period focussed entirely on collaboration around COL.
- Single point of contact for D&Bs to clarify WSCC position on COL issues and getting a quick agreed response between partners;
- Coordination of conversations relating to the LIFT data management tool to support a collaborative approach to its utilisation;
- Review of energy advice service currently provided by Citizens Advice, with a partnership proposal for future support;
- Through regular meetings and conversations, ability to link D&Bs together where there was a common issue being discussed, e.g. warm space grants, creating risk registers to capture key work (Arun & Chichester).

Appendix 2: Communications – activities and outputs (contact Faye Rogers, faye.rogers@westsussex.gov.uk to get involved)

Promotional **activities** include:

- Press engagement and coverage including interviews with Cllr Paul Marshall on Greatest Hit Radio and Wave 105;
- Regular features on COL in residents' e-newsletter (~210,000 people);
- A regular schedule of posts on the WSCC social media platforms;
- Production and distribution of a printed and digital leaflet to schools, Libraries, family hubs and partners;
- Promotion of the Council's support for children who receive benefits-related free school meals (FSM), including the Holiday Activity and Food Programme and school holiday food voucher scheme;
- Encouraging residents and staff to visit our campaign pages through artwork carried in many of our service and staff newsletters.

Webpages *leisure-recreation-and-community/cost-of-living/* October to December 2022

- 18,231 total views
- 14,778 unique views
- 1min 23s average view time
- 49% bounce rate
- Majority of visitors coming through gov delivering links
- Worthing, Chichester, Bognor Regis, Crawley and Horsham all feature in the top-ten list of user locations for these pages

Residents e-newsletter (5 editions)

- 210,000 recipients/ Total Unique Link clicks to COL pages: 5,175

Social media

- Impressions 90,793
- Reach 28,911

Fire and Rescue social media

- Impressions 78,522
- Reach 49,328

Warmer Homes social media

Meta Ad performance, targeted at locations of low EPC rated homes, across West Sussex.

- Outputs: 73.2k reach, 546k impressions
- Cost per result £0.27
- Ad spend to date £1784
- 81% women/17% men/ 20% uncategorised link clicks
- Outcomes: 6,709 link clicks to date.

Outcome: 1081 total applications, 105 properties completed, £884K spend - £8.4k average per property. It is noteworthy that local authority was the key referral source.

Appendix 3: Community food hubs – activities and outputs

Since launching the community food hubs in September we have held three hubs at each location: Broadfield (Crawley), Bognor Regis, Southwick, and a combined hub and education session at Bognor. During this time, we have provided food to 310 residents, which equates to 993 individuals fed.

Date	Location	No of residents attended	How many people were fed
5/10/22	Bognor	28	84
12/10	Southwick	25	54
19/10	Crawley	38	129
2/11	Bognor	53	187
9/11	Southwick	54	168
16/11	Crawley	66	206
5/12	Bognor	47	165

The food provided has an approximate weight of 3313kg (3.3 tonnes) based on average weights from 3 hubs), with a potential value of £3441.67. This means that for each bag provided, residents have received around £12 of food, plus the additional non-monetary support, an increased sense of community, the on-site support, education on food waste reduction, healthy eating, recipes, and new ingredients.

Appendix 4: HSF3 – activities and outputs

On reviewing a sample of the MI data for the support provided for this current period from 1st October 2022 to 31st December 2022:

- The Community Hub application based service has spent £90,728 supporting 1444 households of which 70% of referrals received have been from households with children.
- Citizens Advice continue to focus on providing fuel support with the option for the provision of emergency vouchers and utility bill payments. In the first 3 months £630,415 has been spent supporting 734 households of which 58% of referrals received have been from households with children.
- D&Bs have access to vouchers for white goods and instant-access supermarket vouchers. To date 152 households have been supported of which 56% include a person of pension age.
- Over 18,200 children who meet the eligibility criteria for term-time free school meals received a £15 per week supermarket voucher during the October half term and for each week of the Christmas break.