

## Appendix 1: Cost-of-Living Winter Plan 2023-24

Update 31<sup>st</sup> October 2023

### Context

In the cost-of-living [response update report](#) and [action plan](#) that went to the strategy and resources committee in July 2023, we set out the next steps for the year ahead, based on feedback from the workshop we had with this group and from colleagues and partners across the city. In that report we said that we would provide further details on operational plans for the winter period specifically, given the challenges associated with colder weather and increased costs.

Whilst it is difficult to predict the scale of challenge, we are expecting an increase in the need for support over the winter period. Local data from our dashboard shows there was a rise in demand for the household support fund last year throughout the winter months and it is likely we will see the same this year, based on warnings from national experts about continuing pressures on households. As a city, we are using this plan to prepare and collaborate to make the best use of resources available to us. Below is the latest version of the winter plan. It includes activity in the following areas:

- work to build and sustain Welcome Places
- our communications plan and promoting the support available to individuals
- facilitating the definition of a clear ask for businesses who want to offer support to communities
- interventions designed to make our SCC systems work better for people in crisis and before they reach crisis point
- cross-departmental collaboration on preparations for responding to winter pressures
- closer working with schools and children's services
- access to affordable food and debt advice.

This plan is a live document, which has been – and will continue to be – adapted and added to through conversations within Cost of Living groups, other partnership networks and council services who are also preparing for the pressures of winter.

There are additional activities that are ongoing and longer-term in nature and included in the overall Cost of Living action plan. We are continuing to work on and monitor these activities and will report back on them regularly. They include a review of Council Tax Support and our Corporate Debt policy, work with the Poverty Truth Commission, longer-term planning for the response beyond winter and our approach to poverty and inequality, taking into account the City Goals when they are finalised.

Workstream	Activity	Actions	Key Milestones
Direct and indirect support	Building and sustaining welcome places	<p>Ask Welcome Places what they need, how they want to receive communication and use this information to develop the support offer.</p> <p>Build awareness internal and externally about what support is available.</p> <p>SPF funded community development workers and link workers will be supporting welcome places. When in post, workers to start to map Welcome Places (WPs) &amp; CoL support locally &amp; identify gaps in provision and assist WPs to access support &amp; tailor and develop CoL provision. Support to be provided to workers to develop their knowledge on the support available for WPs and the community.</p> <p>Strengthen relationships between Cost-of-Living hub and LACs.</p> <p>Aligning of WPs with SYCF Funding – we are establishing closer links with all the Welcome Places that have applied for funding, but which aren't showing at present as Welcome Places.</p> <p>WPs will also receive support from the Citizens Advice Sheffield trainers if they want it, which will help to build and sustain their offer.</p> <p>A second round of Sheffield Cost of Living grants from SYCF has been announced of up to £5000 per organisation.</p>	<p>Complete SPF worker recruitment – almost complete</p> <p>Induction and training of workers - underway</p> <p>Communication method for WPs identified and set up – underway</p> <p>Regular meetings established for CDW/LWs - complete</p> <p>Definition of offer of support to welcome places - underway</p> <p>Round 2 SYCF grants awarded - underway</p>
Communications and information sharing	Refreshed communications	<p>Cost of Living communications winter plan is being produced. We are working on reviewing the 'Neighbourhood' leaflet, making sure advice is up-to-date and consulting with partners and LACs and responding to feedback e.g., simplifying the terminology and identifying different ways of sharing. Developing a campaign for social media, etc, that encourages residents to seek support. We are refreshing the toolkit and promoting it internally and externally. Local versions of the toolkit are being produced by Housing, supporting customers and employees to identify more easily services that are available in that locality.</p>	<p>Comms plan signed-off.</p> <p>Refreshed products launching w/c 13<sup>th</sup> Nov.</p>

	Focus on accessibility of COL help to communities	Continued programme of engagement through attending community events in different areas and working with partners to increase direct in-person support in community settings as well as working closely with DWP, Family Hubs, Housing and other statutory services.	
Support to and from business	Support from business	<p>Gather insight from voluntary sector partners on what might be needed from businesses and whether there is a clearly defined ask that could be used for any specific business campaigns e.g. warm packs. Action: Sheffield Business Together will promote their campaign to give money directly to the Food Bank Network (via S2 Food Bank's account).</p> <p>Promote opportunity for VCF partners to make requests for business support via online list.</p> <p>Promote generic message about how businesses can help, via existing communications to businesses in Sheffield e.g., via social media.</p>	<p>Feedback and insight from partners gathered by mid-Oct - complete</p> <p>Online list promoted - ongoing.</p> <p>General messages built into winter comms - ongoing</p>
Indirect and direct support and responding as a landlord and creditor	One Route In	<p>This activity is designed to make our SCC systems work better for people in crisis and before they get to crisis. The following is being established or explored:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Changes to Household Support Fund have been approved by Strategy and Resource Committee and implemented. They are designed to make the scheme more accessible whilst ensuring there is enough money in the fund to last the year.</li> <li>2. Development of the 'One Application Form' using the Council's CRM system to allow assessment for multiple hardship grants in one place is underway.</li> <li>3. In addition to longer term work to review council tax support, we are working with colleagues in Revenue and Benefits teams to explore interventions that get support to people earlier and prevent crisis, for example where there's a trigger for a letter about Council Tax arrears, the Community Helpline could contact the household to provide in. ome maximisation support.</li> <li>4. Working with Yorkshire Water to reduce water bills for people with a low income. SCC have supported over 8,500 tenants to access this support, which has reduced their water charges to £7/week, and work continues to identify further tenants that would be entitled. Meeting with YW in November to discuss rolling it out to all tenures.</li> </ol>	<p>HSF changes: complete 08/23</p> <p>'One Application Form' go-live in December</p>

		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>5. We are working with the homelessness service to explore a targeted intervention to mitigate against Private Rented evictions. There is further scoping to be done, but increased communications and awareness raising could increase take up of the HSF, in addition to other interventions described here, as this is currently low in the Private Rented Sector compared to Council Housing and housing associations. We are also exploring ways to target Discretionary Housing Payments to people in PRS.</li> <li>6. Income maximisation implemented as a core offer through the helpline after a successful pilot. Develop routes in via other requests for hardship support and online appointment requests. Also explore support to access benefits.</li> <li>7. Resources freed up from service improvements to be moved into benefits maximisation and improving access to benefits.</li> <li>8. Increased amount allocated to the Household Support Fund application scheme to prioritise putting money in people's pockets. Additional hardship fund has also been allocated to allow Housing to support tenants directly with their finances and rent payments.</li> <li>9. Work with Changing Futures Sheffield to pilot a project to incorporate lived experience in design, delivery, and evaluation of CoL services.</li> </ol>	
Funding and Infrastructure	Cross-departmental collaboration	Co-ordinating our cost-of-living activity with Childrens, Adults and Housing and linking in with their work to prepare for winter pressures including attending staff briefings, distributing comms materials to front line staff.	
Responding to what matters to specific groups	Focus on children and young people	<p>An increased focus on the impact on children and young people and how we are working with schools and youth services. This has included mapping support for young people from the council and VCFS, identifying and strengthening working relationships with Youth Teams, Community Youth Teams, voluntary sector organisations and LACs.</p> <p>A number of events with young people are planned or have taken place, including one in partnership with Sheffield Futures seeing/supporting 60 young people and a workshop with the Northeast LAC with direct feedback from 40 young people with a deep dive supported session on cost of living, mental health and young people's own mapping of services they use in their local area. Feedback and comments being collated to support further young people's support and link to cost of living.</p>	Fir Vale workshops date tbc.

		<p>Pilot with Fir Vale deliver 3 short workshops for key stage 4 pupils that will repeat with parents. Where to get help, budgeting and debt. Will offer to other schools.</p>	
<p>Direct and indirect support and funding and infrastructure</p>	<p>Improve access to affordable food</p>	<p>Collaborative food sourcing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Investment in S6 infrastructure to enable food purchasing on behalf of other food banks. Aim to increase food bank resilience through time and cost savings.</li> <li>• Investment in food works to enable expansion of food market model into other parts of city (current location Handsworth). Exploring High Green as potential first site for expansion, plan for 6 “pop up” market sites over 5 years.</li> </ul> <p>VAS have received funding (from food access plan £200k last year, rolled over) to take on a food coordination and community organising role (linked to food). Community organiser role being recruited to by VAS to pilot Cooperation Towns (food co-op model started in London, we will be the first Northern town to try this). This will result in small scale food buying co-ops supported by community groups and orgs such as TARAs.</p> <p>Food coordinator role also still being hosted at VAS – enables intelligence to be gathered from food banks, facilitates Food Ladders network in order to develop partnerships, food banks small grants to be distributed (approx. £20k available, this is ICB funding being held by VAS)</p> <p>Work to promote healthy start voucher scheme and increase uptake.</p> <p>School food team lead work re auto-award, increasing FSM uptake and FSM vouchers.</p> <p>Holiday Activities and Food – DfE funded programme continuing until at least end of 2024. School holiday activities for CYP on benefits related food that also include a nutritious meal. Public health supplement this funding to enable activities to take place during half term holidays that are out of scope of HAF.</p> <p>Pilot at the development stage with TARAs and Foodworks Enhancing food options to provide affordable meals in areas of deprivation.</p> <p>Support for foodbanks is the focus of Sheffield Business Together this winter who are promoting their campaign to encourage businesses to donate to Sheffield’s foodbanks.</p> <p>Staff from Housing are working in 6 foodbanks across the city, and are present on a weekly basis, providing advice and support to those customers accessing the foodbanks.</p>	

Direct and indirect support and funding and infrastructure	Access to debt advice	Additional funding to Citizen's Advice Sheffield for their advice line. Increasing resource for income maximisation activity as part of HSF activity above. Encouraging people to access debt advice earlier, via communications and information in toolkit.	LACs considering allocation of funding throughout October and November.
Direct and indirect support	Support for cold weather	<p>The following further interventions are under consideration to support people in fuel poverty:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Linking with Housing Team and Damp and Mould Taskforce. North locality work is already in partnership with the NHS.</li> <li>• understanding how to support people on prepayment meters.</li> <li>• using data to understand where fuel poverty is an issue but low take up of HSF or other support. E.g., in North LAC and SW LAC areas especially, data shows significant fuel poverty and large number of owner-occupiers.</li> <li>• Collaborate with the Housing Energy Efficiency Team to increase referrals through to LEAP programme, creating a link to support the correlations between energy efficiency and Cost-of-living. Embed process for referrals from Community Helpline to Agility Eco for home assessments, boiler replacement scheme and appliance replacement scheme. This includes quick and easy successes such as residents being provided with energy efficient lightbulbs, radiator heat reflectors, door and window seals etc</li> </ul>	

## Measuring Impact

Alongside this plan we have developed a benefit realisation plan, which details how we are measuring the impact of our activities and what the financial and non- financial benefits will be. Measurable benefits include:

- Data about the use of our refreshed comms via QR code data and therefore how many people are accessing support.
- Income gained for households through Yorkshire Water, Income Maximisation and Council Tax support pilots.
- Feedback from people using Welcome Places, the number of Welcome Places receiving Cost of Living sign-posting training from CAB, number of Welcome Places receiving Cost of Living grants.

Recent version wider action plan [8 - App A Cost of living action plan update June 23.pdf \(sheffield.gov.uk\)](#) and Supporting the People of Sheffield Through the Cost of Living Crisis [Draft Protocol for Cabinet Reports \(sheffield.gov.uk\)](#).