

## **BRIEFING NOTE**

### **MOTION: To effect “warm places” provision in public/ community buildings from Autumn 2022**

This Council notes:

1. The cost-of-living crisis is hitting thousands of Lancaster district's households and is expected to get worse as the energy cap is increased dramatically in October.
2. The impact of domestic fuel - and food - price rises will adversely affect the health and well-being of many of the district's residents.
3. Local authorities have a duty to promote and protect the health and well-being of the public, and to prevent avoidable harm.
4. Martin Lewis, the MoneySavingExpert founder, has warned this month that the latest forecasts take the typical annual energy bill to more than one third of the state pension.

Those estimates point to an expected rise of more than 50% compared to current bills, which are already dramatically elevated compared to 12 months ago. Those now paying £100 a month can expect a rise to £165 in October, while those whose monthly bill is now around £200 will be paying £330; and that he describes the effect as a 'cataclysmic issue' for the government.

5. Martin Lewis has posted on Twitter: “Can’t believe I’m writing this, but I wonder if this winter we’ll need ‘warm banks’ the equivalent of ‘food banks’ where people who can’t afford heating are invited to spend their days at no cost with heating (eg libraries, public buildings)?”

Lancaster City Council therefore:

1. (i) Instructs the Chief Executive:
  1. to develop a deliverable plan which ensures that every community in the district has access free of charge to a ‘warm and welcome’ public building where people can keep warm and comfortable this coming autumn and winter during day-times (as a minimum);
  2. to work with Lancashire County Council and other partner organisations to identify locations and public and community buildings for this purpose;
  3. where possible to ensure such 'warm and welcome' public spaces should offer additional support and information to aid individuals to access other services to alleviate hardship.
2. (ii) Resolves that funding be made available from the Household Support Fund (2 and/or 3, to be determined) and the council's hardship reserve to enable this service to be in place by autumn 2022.
3. (iii) Notwithstanding (ii), given the pressing demands on these limited funds, asks the chief executive to write to HM Treasury and to the chair of the LGA to seek funding for this purpose.

**PROPOSER:** Cllr Maddocks

**SECONDRS:** Cllrs Penny; Dant; Hamilton-Cox

**OFFICER BRIEFING NOTE**

The cost of living crisis and rising energy prices are undoubtedly going to affect many of our residents and this will be a particularly difficult winter for some. The Council already has a number of interventions in place or planned to try to mitigate the impact on those who will be the hardest hit. The main ones are summarised below.

The Council has great connections with the VCFSE (and Parish/ Town Councils) consolidated and expanded through our work with communities during the pandemic. The Community Connector team have named contacts for most of that sector and are well placed to undertake a coordinating piece of work to establish what, if any, plans the VCSFE have to offer venues for residents to attend. This could be done within their existing capacity.

In terms of a deliverable plan for the provision of accommodation/ buildings where residents could attend, officers can support Lancashire County Council's work to develop this deliverable plan as agreed at their Council meeting of 14<sup>th</sup> July 2022 following the submission of a motion on this issue. The full cost of this plan and sources of funding are unknown at this stage but due to be reported back to County's cabinet in September and October.

The Council does have some public venues open to residents at times e.g. Museums, Platform, Salt Ayre, Storey and Williamson Park. Space is limited at these venues and they already attract visitors. There could be a potential loss in income if these spaces are occupied by non -paying guests.

### **Household Support Fund**

£421 million has been made available to County Councils and Unitary Authorities in England to support those most in need to help with significantly rising living costs. This funding covers the period 1st April 2022 to 30th September 2022 inclusive.

Awards must be based on the following framework: at least one-third of the total funding will be ring-fenced to support households with children, at least one-third of the total funding will be ring-fenced to support pensioners with up to one-third of the total funding to other households genuinely in need of support.

As Lancashire County Council are the lead authority, they have decided to support families whose children receive free school meals across the county. Therefore, Lancaster City Council has been awarded £555,000 to support pensioners of pensionable age of 66 by 30th September 2022 and in receipt of council tax support across the district.

Across the district, we have approx. 3700 pensioners in receipt of Council Tax Support and therefore will receive a payment of £90 towards Gas and Electric. Those eligible will receive a post office voucher from mid-July issued by the Community Hub. It is estimated that the total amount spent on supporting pensioners will be £360,000. Of the remaining funds, just over £150,000 will be used to support food provision to vulnerable households via Food Clubs, Banks and Pantries via Eggcup. Any remaining money will be used to support the Lancaster District Support Fund.

### **Lancaster District Hardship Fund**

£347,000 of Council Tax Hardship funding will be administered through the Community Hub from 4th July 2022 to support residents with utility bills, food, debts, housing costs, household appliances and other essential items.

Building on lessons learnt from Emergency Assistance Grants (EAGS) and Household Support Fund (round 1), the Community Hub wishes to support residents longer term;

therefore, each application form that is received online, over the telephone and at any of our Customer Services face to face venues will be referred through to Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB). Once an advisor at CAB has seen the residents, the Community Hub will arrange for any essential items to be awarded to residents.

### **Energy Rebate Scheme**

£299,700 of funding to support households who either didn't receive the £150 statutory energy rebate or to provide a top-up payment providing the following eligibility criteria is met:

- CTAX bands E-H on full CTAX support will receive a £150 payment
- CTAX bands A-D on full CTAX support will receive a £30 payment
- CTAX bands A-D on some CTAX support with children under five will receive a £30 payment
- Pensioners over 80 on 1 April 2022, in bands A – D on some CTAX support, will receive a £30 payment.
- SMI in CTAX bands A-D will receive a £30 payment, and in CTAX bands E-H, irrespective of CTAX support, will receive £150
- Disabled Persons Allowance those in bands A-E higher band due to the band reduction a £30 payment and in bands F-H £150 payment.

This fund will go live from mid-August through the Community Hub. Only one payment will be made per household. Payments will be made via Post Office Voucher letter, and all funds must be spent by 30th November 2022. The Community Hub will support residents who are struggling to use their voucher.

Please note a dedicated phone line has been set up to support residents with all of the above grants, 01524 582000 option 7

In addition, the government will give every household in Great Britain £400 off their electricity bill from October onwards. This is called the Energy Bills Support Scheme.

Support is also provided to residents most in need through the Council's Home Improvement Agency. Over the past twelve months Caseworkers have been empowered to provide energy advice through the Energy Redress Scheme to those who need it, whilst the Team also employ a dedicated Technical Retrofit Officer who can complete EPCs on residents properties then provide support and assistance to secure grants towards undertaking the work. This is in addition to the usual work of the HIA which involves adaptations and benefits advice.

### **Council Housing Tenants**

The Council Housing Team employ a dedicated Energy Support Officer who can support residents with energy saving advice, support with access to grants etc This is undertaken with all new residents moving in and can be done for existing residents on a referral basis. In 2021/22 – 244 households benefitted from advice and support.

There is a dedicated Income Management Team, who alongside ensuring rent is collected, significantly support tenants to maximise their income. During 2021/21 this team alongside other housing colleagues successfully supported residents to secure an additional £660k in benefits which was owed to them.

The Council Housing Team has a robust plan to bring all Council housing up to EPC C by 2030, over the past twelve months this has included Phase one of the retrofit programme on Mount Avenue, as well as improving 23 of our hardest to treat properties through funding received by government. Additional measures are undertaken in a planned way throughout the year such as loft insulation top-ups, new doors / windows etc.

**SECTION 151 OFFICER'S COMMENTS**

As noted in the briefing the City Council already has a number of current, or planned interventions to help and support residents. Clarification and consideration of the exact role the City Council is expected to play in this area would be expected ahead of any formal commitment from either Members or Officers

**MONITORING OFFICER'S COMMENTS**

The Monitoring Officer has been consulted and has no comments to add.