

# Cost of Living

Report of the Leader

## Recommended:

1. That £50,000 be allocated towards a Cost of Living Grant scheme for organisations that are working with vulnerable people in Test Valley.
2. That the Head of Strategy and Innovation and Head of Community and Leisure, in consultation with the Leader, be delegated authority to establish and implement the Cost of Living Grant scheme.
3. That the preliminary and proposed work of the Test Valley Partnership in supporting residents with the increased costs of living be noted.

## SUMMARY:

- To report on the work that has been undertaken through the Test Valley Partnership to assist residents dealing with the cost of living crisis prior to understanding any initiatives that might be implemented by the new Prime Minister in the near future.
- To propose that a new Cost of Living Grant scheme is introduced to assist organisations in Test Valley that are directly supporting residents with the cost of living crisis.

## 1 Introduction

- 1.1 Factors such as the aftermath of the Covid pandemic and the war in Ukraine are leading to increases in global fuel and food prices, the like of which has not been seen for several decades.
- 1.2 Whilst the impacts of the cost of living crisis have been felt for most of this year, it is likely to become much worse during the autumn and winter months not least as the increase in energy prices bite further.

## 2 Background

- 2.1 The Government has introduced a number of measures to try and support households during the crisis. This has included:
  - a) A Council Tax rebate of £150 for band A to D properties
  - b) Reducing fuel duty by 5p per litre for 12 months from April 2022
  - c) Providing £400 for people's energy bills from October 2022
  - d) Cost of living payments to those on certain benefits or tax credits worth up to £600.

- 2.2 It is likely that the new Prime Minister will need to implement further measures over forthcoming weeks as energy and food prices continue to rise.
- 2.3 A special meeting of the Test Valley Partnership was convened by Cllr Phil North and Cllr Celia Dowden on 10 August. The purpose of the meeting was to:
- a) Identify what support is already provided in Test Valley
  - b) What gaps in provision are there and what can the partnership do to help.
- 2.4 The meeting identified that there was already much support provided by a range of agencies in the Borough. As a result, a dedicated area of the TVBC web-site has been created to sign-post people and organisations to the support already available <https://www.testvalley.gov.uk/cost-of-living>. In addition the TVBC communications team is running a campaign so that the information is disseminated across various social media platforms, the council's email newsletter and will feature in the forthcoming edition of Test Valley News.
- 2.5 The partnership also agreed that a sub-group would meet weekly on an ongoing basis from September to ensure that partners are aware of developments on the ground and can monitor at the earliest opportunity whether the partnership need to mobilise additional support or take more urgent action. The group involves organisations such as TVBC, the Citizens' Advice Bureaux and local food banks.
- 2.6 To support future quick response, TVBC representatives suggested that they would explore the introduction of a Cost of Living Grant scheme for local organisations that could be quickly implemented.
- 2.7 Finally, a further meeting of the Partnership will be held on the 4 October 2022 to reflect on any announcements of further support and see if any further local initiatives need to be implemented as part of an action plan which members of the partnership sign up to in order to coordinate our support to the people of Test Valley in the months ahead.
- 2.8 It is likely that the new proposed Cost of Living Grant scheme will be similar to the Covid emergency grants which offered up to £500 to organisations supporting the pandemic response. This time it is suggested the limit is higher at £1000, available for organisations supporting people with cost of living related challenges, but not to be used for direct cash support to households. It is proposed that the scheme will be worked up by the Head of Strategy and Innovation and Head of Community and Leisure in consultation with the Leader, working with colleagues in the voluntary sector through the Test Valley Partnership.

### **3 Corporate Objectives and Priorities**

- 3.1 This proposal spans all of the corporate objectives but is most salient in the areas of enabling our people to live well and fulfil their aspirations and for communities to be empowered, connected and able to build upon their strengths.

### **4 Consultations/Communications**

- 4.1 Organisations of the Test Valley Partnership met at a special meeting of the partnership on 10 August 2022 to discuss the issues and impacts of the cost of living crisis which has informed the content of this report.
- 4.2 The Test Valley Partnership brings together organisations working in the borough from across the public, voluntary and community sectors. Its purpose is to enable partners to have a good understanding of communities within the borough and as a result, the partnership is able to respond to the needs of communities in a co-ordinated and organised way by sharing skills, resources and information.

### **5 Risk Management**

- 5.1 An evaluation of the risks indicate that the existing controls in place mean that no significant risks have been identified related to these proposals at this time.

### **6 Resource Implications**

- 6.1 The Council has received a total of £221,000 from Hampshire County Council to deliver projects that support the most vulnerable members of our communities. As at 31 March 2022, a total of £48,400 had been spent against this funding, with the remainder carried forward into 2022/23.
- 6.2 Further commitments have been made to engage community mental health support for those with complex needs / resilience of families and young people (£85,500) and for inclusion of vulnerable people through deliberative activities (£58,000). This leaves approximately £29,100 available for use on this scheme.
- 6.3 The Head of Strategy & Innovation forecasts that the deliberative activities programme will be delivered for approximately £40,000, making a further £18,000 available for this scheme.
- 6.4 It is recommended that a draw from the budget contingency provision of £2,900 be taken to establish a budget of £50,000 for this Cost of Living Grant scheme.

### **7 Legal Implication**

- 7.1 There are no legal implications arising from this report.

## 8 Equality Issues

- 8.1 The report sets out how the council and its partners will work with organisations who are supporting people with cost of living related challenges. This approach ensures that access to help and support will be wide ranging and accessible.

## 9 Conclusion and reasons for recommendation

- 9.1 As set out above, a special meeting of the Test Valley Partnership was convened to consider cost of living implications in the Borough. An outcome of this meeting was a commitment by TVBC representatives to explore whether a grant scheme could be quickly established to assist those agencies in the Borough supporting those residents hardest hit by the cost of living increase.
- 9.2 Initial funding has been identified which could be utilised for this purpose and it is recommended that a grant scheme be established and implemented at the earliest opportunity.

<u>Background Papers (Local Government Act 1972 Section 100D)</u>			
None			
<u>Confidentiality</u>			
It is considered that this report does not contain exempt information within the meaning of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, as amended, and can be made public.			
No of Annexes:	0	File Ref:	N/A
(Portfolio: Leader) Councillor P North			
Officer:	James Moody	Ext:	8130
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