

Cost of Living

Report of the Head of Strategy & Innovation

Recommended:

That Overview and Scrutiny Committee notes and endorses the preliminary and proposed work of the Test Valley Partnership in supporting residents with the increased costs of living.

SUMMARY:

- To report on the work that the Council has undertaken through the Test Valley Partnership to assist residents dealing with the increased cost of living prior to understanding any initiatives that might be implemented by the new Prime Minister in the near future.

1 Introduction

- 1.1 Factors such as the impact 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.
 - e) Limiting energy bill rises for all households for two years, meaning a typical household energy bill will be capped at £2,500 annually until 2024 (this is based on 'typical' use and households who use higher than typical levels of energy will pay more than this future).

- 2.2 It is likely that the new Prime Minister will implement further measures over forthcoming weeks as energy and food prices continue to rise. Further details of any announcements will form part of the update at the meeting of Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- 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 Test Valley 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 that could be quickly implemented for local organisations supporting people with cost of living related challenges, but not to be used for direct cash support to households. Cabinet is due to consider a report on this matter at its meeting on the 14 September 2022.
- 2.7 A further meeting of the Partnership will be held on the 4th 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 At the meeting of Overview and Scrutiny Committee, the Head of Strategy and Innovation and the Communities Manager will provide further detail on the themes, issues and proposed actions highlighted by the partnership that will inform the work of the partners over the coming months.

3 Corporate Objectives and Priorities

- 3.1 The work of the Council in bringing together partners to discuss the impacts of the cost of living crisis forms part of the council's community leadership role and focus on quality of life for all. More specifically it is relevant to the corporate priorities 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 Conclusion and reasons for recommendation

- 5.1 As set out above, a special meeting of the Test Valley Partnership was convened to consider the cost of living implications in the Borough. An outcome of this meeting is that partners will continue to work closely together over the coming weeks and months to jointly address the impacts and develop localised actions that can support communities in Test Valley.

<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:	None	File Ref:	N/A
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