

Divisions Affected - All

CABINET 21 March 2023

Cost of Living Support Measures

Report by Corporate Director Customers and Organisational Development

RECOMMENDATION

1. **The Cabinet is RECOMMENDED to**
 - a) Note the cost of living support measures delivered during 2022/23, as summarised in Table 1;
 - b) Agree to vary the match funding requirements for Council Tax support agreed in September 2022, as set out in paragraph 30;
 - c) Agree to the support package for 2023/24, as summarised in Table 3, noting the flexibility outlined in paragraph 31.

Executive Summary

2. In September 2022, Cabinet received a report on the Council's response to the cost of living crisis and agreed an additional £580,000 of in-year funding for the winter of 2022/23. Subsequently, through the budget setting process, Council agreed £2.3 million of council tax and cost of living support for 2023/24 in addition to the £500,000 annual funding previously agreed.
3. In February 2023, government confirmed details of the extension of the Household Support Fund for a further 12 months from 1 April 2023.
4. This report provides an update on delivery of cost of living support in 2022/23 and makes recommendations for the disbursement of cost of living resources in 2023/24.

Background Information

5. Residents across Oxfordshire continue to feel the impact of significant increases in the cost of living not met by increases in income. While some economic indicators have stabilised following the uncertain period in the autumn of 2022, food and energy prices remain high and interest rates continue to rise. A detailed report setting out the local and national context and the impact of the cost of living crisis in Oxfordshire was made to the Performance & Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee in January 2023. Pending announcements which may be made in the national budget following the publication of this report, further impact is expected if the Energy Price Guarantee is raised in April 2023. The Resolution Foundation have costed the impact of the rise at an average annual increase in energy bills of £850. National Energy Action, a national fuel poverty charity, estimates that this change will result in an increase of fuel poor households by 25%.
6. As a result, national government continues to implement a range of measures to support households, including raising the level of state benefits, extending cost of living payments for some low-income households and continuing the Household Support Fund in 2023/24.
7. Government recognises that some specific groups may have additional needs not met by national schemes or will not be able to access national funding. Local measures are therefore essential in mitigating cost of living impact. In addition to deploying national resources, the County Council has identified local funding to provide flexibility and longer-term support, outside of restricted and shorter-term national schemes.

2022/23 Delivery update

8. In addition to national resources provided through the Household Support Fund (HSF), Council agreed a four-year £500,000 p/a fund from March 2023. In 2022/23, this local funding has delivered an accelerated programme of support for energy saving measures through the Better Housing Better Health Programme and provided resources to local voluntary and community sector advisory services to maintain capacity for debt and money advice. An additional £200,000 of funding was agreed by Cabinet in September 2023 to deliver an energy support scheme for community buildings and a grants round for VCS organisations providing direct support for cost of living issues. Detail on the delivery and outcome of these schemes was set out in the [Cost of Living Update](#) to Performance & Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee in January 2023. £380,000 was also agreed in-year from the Budget Priorities Reserve to match-fund Council Tax Hardship funds.
9. The support measures delivered during 2022/23 are summarised in table 1 below.

Scheme	Description	Status	Value	Funding Source
Support for Families, Children, and Schools				
Free school meal equivalent support	£15 per eligible child per week of school holiday for all holiday weeks with equivalent support for Early Years Providers. Schools may provide at their discretion to students not eligible for FSM. 15,000 children supported.	Delivered	£2,740,000	HSF 2 & 3
Early Years Support Grant	Equivalent support for eligible younger children paid in a single grant of £60 for winter 2022/23. 2,000 children supported.	Delivered	£113,000	HSF 3
Education Welfare Grant	Funding for schools to support families experiencing acute hardship with essential spending such as warm clothing and breakfast club fees.	In delivery	£222,000	HSF3 & 4
Targeted support to low income and/or high energy costs impacted households				
Support for low-income pensioner households	£85 vouchers for 11,000 low-income pensionable households with 90% uptake.	Delivered	£935,000	HSF 2
Council Tax Hardship Grants	Providing match funding to city & district councils to increase the support available for those residents in exceptional circumstances of financial hardship by providing discretionary assistance with their council tax.	In delivery	Up to £380,000	Budget priorities reserve.
Emergency Welfare Schemes	Delegated to City and District Councils, including additional administrative costs grant. Provision enables direct and VCS delivery of support including community food services and application-based emergency support. Estimated 8,000 individuals supported including £140,000 specifically provided to 656 pensioner households.	Round 2: Delivered Round 3: In delivery	£620,000 £559,712	HSF 2 HSF 3
Cost of Living Grant for Housing Benefit Recipients	£300 grant to Housing Benefit-only Recipients who will not receive the national cost of living payments. 4,250 recipients.	In delivery	£1.3m	HSF3

Grant for families with severely ill and disabled children	Grant to assist with exceptional energy costs to those families in significant need, referred by professionals.	In delivery	£15,000	HSF3
Support for care leavers.	£300 cost of living grant to care leavers who miss out on national cost of living payments, reflecting increased costs of accommodation.	In delivery	£225,000	HSF3
Support for shared lives carers and foster carers	£200 grant for all shared lives (78) and foster and similar carers (500) for increased energy and food costs	Delivered	£128,000	HSF3
Essential items for asylum seekers	Provision of basic clothing and other personal items not available through the VCS	Delivered	£5,000	HSF3
Support for Voluntary & Community Sector				
Community Building Energy Support Scheme (CBESS)	£100,000 grant funding administered via Oxfordshire Community Foundation (OCF) to help VCS organisations with energy costs this winter. 105 projects supported.	Delivered	£100,000	One off bring-forward of reserve funding
Contribution to Oxfordshire Community Foundation's cost of living grant round	£106,000 funding provided to OCF's cost of living grant round to support community – In addition OCF contributed £100,000 from funds held and raised an additional £85,000 in leveraged philanthropic funding. 41 projects funded.	Delivered	£106,000 (Contributing to total funding of £291,000)	As above
Grant to Citizens Advice	£210,000 grant to Citizens Advice to maintain debt and benefits advice services until June 2023. The Council also provided £50,000 to Citizens Advice to support with the costs of administration of HSF.	Delivered	£260,000	Cost of living revenue funding agreed February 2022 HSF 2
Enhanced support for Better Housing Better Health	Support for Better Housing Better Health , a local energy advice and retrofit service which helps keep residents warm at home and improves the energy efficiency of their homes. This includes a telephone and a home visit service.	In delivery	£500,000	Various sources across the Council and City/District partners including £245,000 from cost of living revenue agreed February 2022

Table 1: Summary of 2022/23 cost of living support

Support Package Proposals for 2023/24

10. In developing local measures to tackle the cost of living crises, the Council is taking the following approach:
 - Targeting limited funding towards the most financially at risk, including those who will not receive support from the national schemes;
 - Mitigating the impact of Council Tax rises for the lowest income households;
 - Working in partnership by putting resources where they have maximum impact e.g., by devolving funding to the City and District Councils and to the voluntary and community sector;
 - Delivering timely and sustainable responses by building on existing and proven models where available (e.g., by expanding Better Housing Better Health) and interventions which support people to support themselves, in line with core corporate approaches, including The Oxfordshire Way (e.g., support to advisory services);
 - Protecting community infrastructure e.g., VCS support grants;
 - Avoiding exclusion in delivery by communicating through a diverse range of channels and designing out digital exclusion;
 - Delivering tactical responses at the same time as developing longer term, strategic measures.

Scrutiny input

11. The Performance & Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee received a [Cost of Living Update](#) in January 2023. The Committee feedback on a number of issues including:
 - The need to consider longer term strategic issues related to poverty and deprivation, alongside crisis support;
 - The need to reach-out to a wide range of diverse community organisations to raise awareness of support;
 - The need to guard against digital exclusion.
12. These issues are reflected in the approach set out above and in parallel action-planning for related longer-term work, including for the Digital Exclusion and Sustainable Food strategies.

Funding available

13. On 20 February 2023, government confirmed details of the fourth round of the Household Support Fund (HSF4) from the Department of Work and Pensions. This new round has the advantage of running for a full year. Restrictions on the cohorts that must be supported have also been lifted, allowing more local flexibility. However, the areas that must be considered for support have

increased and now include advisory services, families with children of all ages, pensioners, unpaid carers, care leavers and disabled people. An additional specification has now been made on the requirement for an open-access application-based scheme to be in place for the majority of the HSF funding window. This is in addition to the requirements to consider supporting those who miss out on national support measures because of their specific circumstances and locally identified additional priorities, including younger people in work. While Oxfordshire will receive £6.7 million for 2023/24, it is clear that the total range of government aspirations for HSF4 cannot be met in full.

14. As set out above, the Council has also agreed £2.3m one-off funding for cost of living and council tax support for 2023/24, in addition to the £500,000 p/a funding already in the revenue budget for emergency welfare support.

2023-24 Cost of Living Funding	£m
Household Support Fund 4	6.72
Emergency Welfare Fund (revenue)	0.50
Council Tax / Cost of living (one off revenue)	2.30
Total 2023-24	9.52

Table 2: Cost of living funding summary

15. To secure HSF4 funding, the Council must demonstrate compliance with detailed requirements. Therefore, the specific use of HSF is limited. Locally available funding provides the Council with the flexibility to meet locally met need that is not HSF compliant. To ensure the maximum funding is accessed with most impact, there will be movement between funding sources through the year. However, for transparency, support proposals can be broadly split into HSF and locally funded schemes. These schemes are outlined below and summarised in Table 3.

2023-24 Cost of Living Planned Expenditure	£m
New Local Crises Fund	1.00
Housing Benefit 50% Equivalence Payment (£450)	1.76
Free Schools Meal equivalent support (inc Early Years)	3.55
Education Support Grant	0.20
Schools sustainable food programme	0.16
Extend accelerated Better Housing Better Health for 12 months	0.24
Support to VCS Advisory Services	0.30
Practical support for those leaving hospital	0.02
Administration and evaluation	0.20
<i>Funding Delegated to City and District Councils</i>	
City and District HSF delegation	0.50
Match funding the Council Tax Support Fund	0.78
Doubling Discretionary Housing Payments	0.81
<i>Delegated sub-total</i>	<i>2.09</i>
Total 2023-24	9.52

Table 3: Cost of living planned expenditure

HSF 4 Support Proposals

Housing Benefit 50% Equivalence Payment

16. Those who receive Housing Benefit but do not also receive other qualifying benefits will not receive the one-off £650 cost of living payment in 2022/23. They will also be ineligible for the £900 available in 2023/24.
17. Housing Benefit is a means-tested benefit, paid according to rules set nationally by the Department for Work and Pensions, but administered by local authorities. While many Housing Benefit claimants will also be receiving an additional qualifying benefit for the national Cost of Living Payments, Housing Benefit itself is not a qualifying benefit. The Government says that because the benefit is administered directly from local authorities, and often paid directly to landlords, that cost of living payments cannot be delivered nationally to those receiving only Housing Benefit. However, it is clear that Housing Benefit recipients are often as or more in need than those in receipt of other qualifying benefits. Therefore, government has asked local authorities to prioritise this cohort when planning for HSF3 and 4.
18. At 4,400 individuals, this is a significant and important cohort to reach in Oxfordshire. However, as noted above, HSF cannot fund the full range of government aspirations and a fully equivalent payment cannot be afforded without eliminating other support priorities. Within HSF3 provision was made

for a £300 payment to eligible residents and this is currently in delivery, with a high-level of take-up. HSF4 proposes to include a £450 payment which is 50% of the national cost of living payment for 2023/24.

Free School Meal Equivalent Support

19. Free School Meal (FSM) equivalent support for school holiday periods was provided as part of HSF 1,2 and 3 and their predecessors through a payment of £15 per benefits-related FSM-eligible child and young person attending any state-funded school and college in Oxfordshire, per week of school holiday. Equivalent funding was provided to Early Years settings. In addition, school leaders use their discretion to provide funding beyond FSM eligibility. This scheme is well understood and has come to be relied amongst recipient families. While taking a large percentage of the available HSF funds, it has very high take-up and avoids additional application-based system meaning that regular support is delivered directly to parents. It is therefore recommended that this support continues through the HSF 4 period. (It should be noted that given the timing of this report, funding has already been provided for the Easter 2023 holiday under existing officer delegations for the administration of HSF 3.)

Education Support Grant

School leaders have appreciated the discretion to extend the provision of FSM equivalent support to non-FSM eligible children. However, schools have also reported that they are having to meet additional needs from their own resources to ensure access to education for children in exceptional need. This has included, for example, the provision of warm clothing, footwear and fees for breakfast clubs. In order to increase capacity in schools to meet need and reduce impact on local budgets, HSF3 included a provision an Education Support Grant. This was launched late in 2022/23 and schools have been given the flexibility to deliver spending through to end of March 2024, covering the full period of next winter. Funding is therefore included within the HSF4 package.

City and District HSF delegation

20. In previous funding rounds, the County Council has delegated funding to the City and District Councils to establish local emergency welfare schemes and provide related community support. Funding is allocated against a formula that takes into account population and relative deprivation. These schemes work in partnership with the voluntary and community sector. Local intelligence enables flexible support to be delivered that aligns with existing local provision, avoiding duplication and maximising impact. The flexibility of City and District Councils and our VCS partners has allowed the rapid delivery of short-notice schemes and significant funding has been delivered to residents directly through VCS advisory services. While in some cases direct delivery has aligned with VCS business models, in other organisations it has stretched capacity. Some organisations are therefore keen to move away from direct delivery. With the implementation of the longer-term Oxfordshire Crisis Fund (see below) the requirement to deliver application-based support at district and city level will fall

away. To maintain the impact of local intelligence on the overall package, it is proposed to continue delegating HSF funding to the City and Districts but without the requirement to deliver an application-based emergency welfare fund. This will give the City and District Councils new flexibility to target HSF as makes most sense locally, within the requirements of the fund.

Practical Support for those leaving hospital

21. Adult Social Care have highlighted concerns about those discharged from hospital who may be unable to ensure their homes are energy efficient or warm and may struggle to access heating repairs, energy top-ups or national support schemes in the short-term. They may also find it challenging to navigate benefits or be worried about leaving hospital. Officers recommend helping vulnerable adults with significant energy costs at the point of hospital discharge with a small discretionary fund to provide additional flexibility to existing provision. Such a cohort represents a vulnerable group, many of whom have a long-term health conditions and/or a disability.

Locally Funded Support

New Local Crisis Fund

22. The case was made in the September 2022 Cost of Living Cabinet report for implementing a new local crisis fund to give Oxfordshire the flexibility to deliver new funding streams and meet emerging needs at a faster pace. Local revenue funding will allow this scheme to continue beyond the horizon of nationally confirmed funding and give an element of stability for residents and professionals working in the field. The scheme has been in development during the winter and is due to launch in early 2023/24. £500,000 of local funding is available, which is comparable to other local authorities operating similar schemes. This report recommends enhancing this with an additional £500,000 of HSF4 funding. This will ensure that Oxfordshire complies with the HSF4 requirement for an open access application-based fund and enhance the total funding available in the system to alleviate cost of living pressures. The objectives of the scheme and the criteria for support are in development and will be consulted on with VCS partners including advisory agencies, internal teams and City and District Councils.

Schools Sustainable Food Programme

23. New Public Health resource is already agreed to deliver interventions related to obesity in schools in 2023/24. It is proposed to augment the business case for that scheme to use cost of living funding to delivery complimentary interventions to maximise the availability of funding and quality of food provided in schools. This is expected to include development support to bring in additional external funding to targeted schools in priority areas for example for breakfast clubs, create learning networks amongst catering staff to share best practice, and further work to maximise take up of Free School Meals.

Extend accelerated Better Housing Better Health

24. The Better Housing Better Health (BHBH) outreach programme supports older residents, those with health conditions or lower incomes and those in receipt of care, with support to stay warm, well and independent in their homes. Between April and December 2022 over 1,600 households have been supported over the telephone with a warm and well assessment, and 201 home visits have been completed. At least £64,800 of additional income from benefits has been identified, 74 households were signposted to funding to access new heating systems or insulation and energy efficient measures have saved nearly 90,000 kg/carbon dioxide. Over £54,000 of fuel vouchers have been distributed. The service also provides home visits to particularly vulnerable residents where small energy efficiency measures are provided, such as draught excluders and warm packs. The service takes referrals from a wide range of partners such as the Care Leavers and Sensory Impairment teams, and makes onward referrals to food banks, Citizens Advice (118) and Fire and Rescues Safe and Well visits (120). Over 1,000 Oxfordshire staff and volunteers have been trained on Fuel Poverty and the sources of support available. The overall aim is to provide holistic, long-term solutions to help people stay healthier and independent for longer in their homes. BHBH was launched as a partnership of City, District and County Council Public Health with initial funding of £60,000 per year for 400 telephone calls. In January 2022 a pilot project started providing home visits, with additional funding from the NHS, supported 400 visits over two years for £140,000. Additional cost of living funding from the County Council in 2022/23 allowed the scheme to surge, with an additional 300 visits and 2,200 telephone calls facilitated and £30,000 of additional practical support measures delivered.
25. The BHBH service is being quantitatively evaluated using health and social care records to explore the impacts of support on residents and the systems that support them and a qualitative evaluation will be produced. Both are expected to report in the Winter of 2023 to inform future funding mechanisms to ensure the sustainability of the service. Currently Public Health and the District and City have committed to funding a basic core offer for the next two years. A new service is being procured to start from November 2023 for two years, with the option to extend for a further two years. The contract will allow for additional funding to increase capacity and services to adapt to the changing climate action and energy bill landscape. Additional Cost of Living Funding of £250,000 would take the expanded level of service through winter 2023/24 and future funding will be sought based on the evaluation of impact on health and possible climate action benefits.

Support to VCS Advisory Services

26. Local advisory services, covering debt, benefits, employment, credit and other money advice, are under unprecedented pressure with local funding reduced at the same time as a surge in demand for services. The Council and its partners support and contract with advice services through multiple channels. In the medium to long term, the whole support network requires strategic review and consolidation, including in the context of district/city budget pressures.

However, given current pressure, there is an argument for further one-off support. The mechanism to provide the recommended support in 2023/24 is under review to enhance and not duplicate business as usual arrangements.

Council Tax Support and Discretionary Housing Payments Support

27. In proposing the 2023/24 budget to Council, Cabinet noted that while increasing the County's Council Tax precept was required to provide for essential services, there would be an undeniable impact on household budgets. To help mitigate this, Council agreed a cost of living and council tax support fund to minimise the impact on the lowest income council tax paying households. In partnership with the City and District Councils, officers have developed two further support proposals. These are intended to be as simple as possible to administer, given the pressure on local revenue and benefit teams, while still meeting the aims of the fund.
28. Firstly, the fund will double the funding available to the City and District Councils through the national Council Tax Support Fund, costing £780,000. This will ensure that all residents paying council tax but in receipt of Council Tax Support receive a discount of up to £50 on their council tax bill during 2023/24. This group represents the lowest income households who are still paying an element of Council Tax and for most, will eliminate the impact of the County Council's precept increase for the coming year. Surplus funding will be available to local councils to enhance their local council tax hardship arrangements, which vary from authority to authority, in line with the guidance of the national support scheme. Where billing authorities have already made provision to top up the national Support Fund to at least the 'up to £50' level, the County's delegation can be applied in full to council tax hardship arrangements, supporting those falling outside of the Council Tax Reduction policies. It should be noted that some billing authorities have relied on the budget provision agreed at Council to apply this discount in annual bills being dispatched ahead of year-end.
29. In addition, the District and City Councils have made a strong case to enhance the funding available for Discretionary Housing Payments. DHP helps to mitigate some of the impact of high housing costs for those in receipt of housing benefit or the housing element of universal credit, but whose housing costs are not met by the available benefit payments. National DHP funding has been reduced in recent years and local schemes expect more need to present than they will be able to support next year. This report proposes to match government support for Discretionary Housing Benefit (DHB), providing £810,000 of additional funding to mitigate some of the impact of increasing housing costs, where this is not met by the available benefit payments.
30. Following the decision of Cabinet in September 2022 to provide additional match-funding for Council Tax hardship schemes, officers have been agreeing local schemes with each City and District. Cherwell District Council does not operate a hardship scheme making the match proposals as set out in the September report more costly and administratively burdensome to implement. Cherwell proposes to demonstrate the match through local additional funding to its Discretionary Housing Payment scheme (over and above the funding set

out above) and with additional welfare support to Housing Benefit recipients, a group identified as missing out on national schemes. As this approach minimises costs and aligns with the new support proposed in this report, officers support that approach and recommend varying the match funding requirement accordingly.

Flexibility and additional support measures

31. The support package summarised in Table 3 represents current planning for the year ahead. However, there is significant uncertainty for example, in the number of FSM eligible students in the next academic year and in the take up of Housing Benefit cost of living support. In order to fully commit the available funding and to meet new needs and those needs not directly supported in the current package, the overall programme and spend will remain under review throughout the year with significant changes reported through business management reporting.

Communications and Engagement

32. A cross-county digital and physical communications campaign is ongoing in collaboration with District and City Council partners with two purposes:

Highlighting interventions for stakeholders and residents – including the allocation of funding, the agreement of policies, news about delivery of packages of support with partners. This is being delivered through the press, social media, and residents' e-newsletter.

Providing countywide signposting and support – practical signposting and support provided through social media, digital channels, and posters. The Council's role is to clearly articulate the help on offer and provide a central place for people to come to find out information.

33. Additional resources have been provided to the Children, Education and Families directorate Family Information Service. This has allowed the service to develop a new e-booklet on support measures for parents, update information on foodbanks, link with District and City Councils on support measures and advice clinics, update information on tax free childcare and engage on social media on help with childcare costs, funding entitlements and Holiday, Activities and Food provision (HAF).

Corporate Policies and Priorities

34. The County Council's Strategic Plan 2023-2025 lists as its second priority *tackling inequalities*. In addition, as set out above, priority three, *prioritising the health and wellbeing of residents* and priority seven, *creating opportunities for children and young people to reach their full potential* are directly impacted by levels of deprivation. The current cost of living crisis has the potential to increase inequality and absolute deprivation. Efforts to alleviate the impact of increases to the cost of living and broader work on enhancing the Council's

impact on economic inequality, as set out above, will therefore support the longer-term delivery of these strategic priorities.

Financial Implications

35. Funding arrangements for the recommendations in this report in 2023/24 are set out in paragraph 14 above.

Comments checked by: Danny Doherty, Interim Finance Business Partner, danny.doherty@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Legal Implications

36. Where any grant constitutes a subsidy, the Council must comply with the Subsidy Control Act 2022 and, where necessary, carry out a subsidy control assessment to ensure that the grant is compliant with the subsidy control principles.
37. Where there are specific powers to provide support, these are detailed in the report. Otherwise, the council will rely on the general power of competence under the Localism Act 2011.

Comments checked by: Paul Grant, Head of Legal, paul.grant@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Equality & Inclusion Implications

38. As set out in the background papers to this report, single parents, people with disabilities, carers, younger working aged people and people from some minority ethnic communities are more likely to have low incomes and so be disproportionately impacted by increases to the cost of living.
39. The overall support package for 2203/24 is designed to meet the needs of the most economically disadvantaged residents in Oxfordshire.
40. The new proposals outlined herein have taken multiple approaches to meet the needs of vulnerable residents with essential costs, especially energy, this winter.
41. To ensure the scheme provides support to the most in need, officers have recommended using existing criteria to identify vulnerable residents, such as Free School Meal (FSM) eligibility and receipt of Housing Benefit or Council Tax Reduction. In the case of FSM equivalent support, support is extended at the discretion of schools to ensure the scheme supports those who do not quite qualify for existing FSM criteria.

42. Discretion is at the heart of many elements of the schemes, which are designed with flexibility so that local professionals can exercise discretion to support a need that would not otherwise be met. This includes the Free School Meal programme, Hospital Discharge Support Fund and funding for Better Housing Better Health.
43. Nevertheless, there are various groups which this proposal has been unable to support. However, by including an open access Crisis Fund and maintaining local delegation to the City and District Councils, support can be made available for those who may not be able to access existing support programmes. The County Council's agreements with the City and District Councils includes the requirement for the recipient councils to have due regard to issues of equality and access in the design of their local schemes.
44. Throughout the design of interventions, officers have been tasked to mitigate digital exclusion. While digital channels provide an efficient route for many residents, alternatives are offered including access to telephone support and face to face support in libraries and through advisory services.

Sustainability Implications

45. Reducing energy usage can have the dual benefit of both reducing costs to the consumer and impact on the environment. This report sets out how the Councils is already supporting retrofit schemes and energy advice to low-income households. Some energy reduction schemes can be inaccessible to lower income households or households in specific circumstances making them more likely to be more vulnerable to the impact of the cost of living crises, for example those living in private rented accommodation. To maximise impact, existing and future Council schemes should therefore prioritise supporting both reduction of energy costs for those on the lowest incomes, as well as maximising absolute reductions in energy usage and associated carbon emissions.

Consultation

46. In developing proposals for support, officers have engaged with the City and District Councils and relevant elements of the voluntary and community sector, including through regular briefings with advice agencies. Through implementation, further engagement will seek to ensure that the County Council's support schemes are aligned to those of others and that we continue to work with partners to identify those elements of the community most impacted.

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Background papers: [Responding to the Cost of Living Crisis](#), Cabinet, 20 September 2023 (Note: recommendation d. was amended by Cabinet to increase the allocation of funding and ensure that funding was dispersed equitably between the City and District Councils applying a funding formula based on population and relative-deprivation.)

[Cost of Living Update](#), Performance & Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee, 19 January 2023

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