



<b>Report to:</b>	Cabinet	7 November 2023
<b>Lead Cabinet Member:</b>	Cllr Bill Handley, Lead Cabinet Member for Communities	
<b>Lead Officer:</b>	Liz Watts, Chief Executive Officer	
<b>Key Decision:</b>	No	

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## Cost of Living support update

### Executive Summary

1. This report provides an update on the cost-of-living related schemes agreed at Cabinet on 20 March 2023 along with an evaluation of the earlier work undertaken during the first phase of this project, from 14 November 2022 to 31 March 2023.

### Recommendations

2. It is recommended that Cabinet notes the report and appendices A to C, and provides officers with any comments as required.

### Details

#### Background

3. The Council declared a cost-of-living crisis at its September 2022 Council meeting. Following this, an initial package of support was agreed by Cabinet on 14 November 2022, utilising a grant from the Integrated Care Board (ICB). This package focussed on 'heating and health', supporting projects such as Warm Hubs, and the provision of lower cost methods of heating and cooking at home. The first phase of the project came to an end on 31 March 2023.
4. Following agreement by Cabinet on 20 March 2023, the Council entered the second phase of its cost-of-living crisis response. The recommendations aimed to create self-sustaining projects that could continue beyond initial funding and provide support to residents across the district experiencing hardship. Nine projects were recommended and a budget of £206,000 was assigned.

## Phase 1 evaluation

5. A full evaluation report of phase one of this work has been undertaken and is attached as Appendix A. Some key points from the full evaluation are outlined below.
6. An online fundraiser was set up to allow residents and businesses to provide additional support to supplement the Council's efforts during the cost-of-living crisis. Online donations raised over £2,000 to support the provision of extra energy-saving appliances.
7. Over 400 people were provided with either an electric blanket, a slow cooker, or in most cases both. These were prioritised using Council data to identify those likely to be most in need. Following feedback from 103 of these residents, over 85% of respondents said they had noticed at least some difference in their energy bills because of receiving and using the slow cooker. In addition, we estimate that the average electric blanket recipient saved £29.61 per week on their central heating bill if they used their electric blanket for warmth instead. Over January to March, this would have resulted in a saving of £384.93 per household. Furthermore, the anecdotal feedback received for both products was extremely positive, with full feedback comments outlined in Appendix A.
8. In total across South Cambridgeshire, 25 Warm Hubs were in operation for a combined total of 2,942 hours. They utilised 101 volunteers who were mostly local to that community. Across all 25 Hubs, there were a total of 9,363 attendee visits from October 2022 to March 2023. An external evaluation took place for this project, attached at Appendix B. According to Rose Regeneration who were commissioned by Cambridgeshire ACRE to undertake the evaluation, for every £1 invested in them, the Warm Hubs delivered £4.19 of social value.
9. 100 Warm Packs containing a blanket, hot water bottle, thermos flask, thermal socks, a hat, and gloves were distributed by South Cambridgeshire District Council (SCDC) officers who were in contact with residents requiring extra support. Having Warm Packs on hand provided an extra bit of support that officers were able to provide to residents struggling with fuel poverty and the cost-of-living crisis.

## Phase 2 update

- 10. Cost-of-living crisis response strategy** – Project plans for the delivery of the initiatives agreed at Cabinet on 23 March have been created. This includes a timeline for each project, and the progress of each project against its timeline can be found in paragraph 22. Officers are also working closely with officers at Cambridgeshire County Council to help develop a County-wide anti-poverty strategy to ensure the work being carried out at different organisations is complementary.
- 11. Roadshow of cost-of-living talks** - A talk outlining help available during the cost-of-living crisis has been written and is due to be trialled at its first Parish Council meeting on 16<sup>th</sup> November. It includes support available from central

Government, local financial support, food-related support, financial advice, and community support. Should the talk be successful and useful to the Parish, it will be offered to further Parish Councils and Community Groups, encouraging people to apply for all support they are eligible for.

Officers have also begun to offer a short training to community volunteers outlining cost-of-living support available so they can pass this information on to any residents they already work with.

- 12. Evolution of Warm Hubs into Community Hubs** - Following the successful implementation of the Warm Hubs project from October 2022 to March 2023, many of the Warm Hubs have now evolved into Community Hubs. A Community Hub is a space where other services or activities may be delivered locally, whilst people can also access further support, where needed, through the cost-of-living crisis to ensure their health and wellbeing is maintained and improved. There are 13 hubs that are continuing to operate. These are based in Caldecote, Cambourne, Comberton, Gamlingay (x2), Grantchester, Hardwick, Landbeach, Melbourn, Meldreth, Northstowe, Willingham, and Sawston (though these may change in the course of developing phase 2 of the work). The majority of the funding for continuing these hubs will be drawn from a further grant from the ICB received in April 2023. This funding will also cover the employment of 3 'Village Agents' who will support volunteers and link health and wellbeing service providers to Community Hubs to ensure that a physical space can be allocated to outreach sessions. The Community Hubs will continue to be run by Cambridgeshire ACRE who have been awarded a two-year contract to continue their provision.

The 13 Community Hubs that have remained open received 13,858 visitors between April and September. In the previous six-month period from October to March, when there were 25 Hubs operating, the comparative figure was 9,363 visits, highlighting the continued increase in visitor numbers as they become further embedded into their communities.

- 13. Provision of energy saving appliances** - 500 electric blankets will be provided to South Cambridgeshire residents struggling with the high cost of energy this winter. The blankets will be targeted at people claiming Attendance Allowance or a certain level of Personal Independence Payment who are also receiving Council Tax Support. This is a group of people who have a long-term physical health condition or disability and are also feeling financial pressures. Any remaining stock after targeting this cohort of people will be distributed by Council officers that work with vulnerable residents.

All eligible residents have been sent a letter containing details of how to receive the electric blanket, with over 200 blankets having already been delivered.

- 14. Council Tax Support Campaign** - A new leaflet focussing on Council Tax Support, and other areas of support, has been designed and distributed, and can be found under Appendix C. This leaflet was distributed with every Council Tax payment reminder to ensure that those who couldn't pay and were eligible for support were made aware of all the help available. In addition, the leaflet has

been distributed to a number of Community Groups and Libraries across the district, including at Gypsy, Romany, and Traveller drop-in sessions, as well as being distributed online and on social media. The leaflet will continue to be used over winter at various outreach events and can be provided to Community Groups, Members or Parishes.

In addition, a cost-of-living winter communications campaign will begin on 8<sup>th</sup> November and run up to Christmas. This will include adverts and editorials in the Cambridge Independent, Facebook adverts, and adverts on Guided Busway stops within South Cambridgeshire. This campaign will direct people to the cost-of-living support section of the Council's website, and will encourage residents to claim support they are eligible for.

- 15. South Cambridgeshire Sustainable Food Network** – Officers have been working to bring together and develop a Sustainable Food Network. Officers have contacted every known foodbank in the South Cambridgeshire District. In July, the first networking meeting of all these foodbanks took place where introductions were made, and discussions took place on how to work together and what the Council can offer them in ways of support. One area of support that emerged from this meeting was the desire to have drop-in advice sessions at a number of foodbanks to ensure that those attending foodbanks have access to a wider range of wrap-around support. Since then, Income Maximisation Officers at the Council have been attending Harston Food Hub, in addition to the outreach sessions already run by Citizens Advice Cambridge at Northstowe Foodbank, funded by Cambridge City Foodbank. The network has agreed to continue meeting quarterly.

A messaging platform containing all known Foodbanks in South Cambridgeshire has also been set up to ensure that no food goes to waste if any foodbank has a surplus. This has already been used to distribute food between the foodbanks and it is hoped this can provide a benefit to the community by not only providing foodbanks with extra food, but also by combatting food waste to help achieve our climate goals. There are also plans to run a campaign encouraging more businesses to donate their excess food to foodbanks.

- 16. New Foodbanks** - Following the commitment to set up 5 new foodbanks made at Cabinet on 23 March 2023, officers developed an innovative approach to make this happen as soon as possible with the launch of the Mobile Food Hub. In partnership with Hope CIC, a scheme was devised whereby a van is filled with food and visits different locations on different days of the week. Food storage is often the biggest barrier to starting a foodbank, so centralising this overcame that problem. Since its launch at the end of June, the Mobile Food Hub has begun to visit 5 locations: Orchard Park, Papworth, Fulbourn, Linton, and Duxford. All these locations were selected using census deprivation data, mapped against where current foodbanks already operate to ensure that the Mobile Food Hub helps bridge the gap between existing services. It is hoped that as the project progresses, more families can be supported, and more locations can be visited. Additional stops will require additional financial support from each Town or Parish Council to ensure the project's longevity. For the existing stops, plans are in place to recruit local volunteers to decrease reliance on Hope CIC, and eventually

transition to a regular, locally run, community scheme to enable the mobile scheme to continue to expand and reach areas of the district where there is limited support. No referral is needed to use the Mobile Food Hub and residents can just turn up on the day.

Since the Mobile Food Hub started at the end of June, it has received 327 visits. This number has been consistently growing since its inception and is anticipated to rise further over the coming months, especially as we approach winter.

**17. Community vegetable gardens** - Planning work will begin on this project over the winter. It is anticipated that the project will help create new vegetable gardens, while improving existing ones, and encourage more donations of fresh food to those in need through South Cambridgeshire’s developing foodbank network.

**18. Provision of food parcels** - The Council continues to provide free food parcels containing a week’s worth of food to residents who either cannot travel to their nearest foodbank or need food in an emergency. The parcels are delivered within 48 hours and are used as a last resort. They can only be accessed through a referral by a SCDC officer or volunteers at one of our 13 Community Hubs across the district. 115 food parcels have been delivered since the scheme began in January 2023, and will continue through the current year, with 72.2% of these parcels having been to women.

**19. Data analysis** - A cross-departmental group has been established to further study how the Council can better use data to target areas of support. An example of this already in action is that all the Mobile Food Hub locations were selected using available deprivation data, mapped against where current foodbanks operate. Work on this project will continue through the whole two-year cost-of-living programme.

## 20. Summary of project progress

Project	Planned delivery date	Progress summary
Cost-of-living crisis response strategy	May 2023	Complete
Roadshow of cost-of-living talks	October 2023 – March 2024	On track
Evolution of Warm Hubs into Community Hubs	September 2023 and ongoing	Complete – provision ongoing
Provision of energy saving appliances	October 2023 - March 2024	On track
Council Tax Support Campaign	June 2023 and ongoing	On track
South Cambridgeshire Sustainable Food Network	Ongoing	On track
New Foodbanks	September 2023	Complete – provision ongoing
Community Vegetable Gardens	April 2024 – October 2024	On track – not yet initiated
Provision of Food Parcels	Ongoing	On track
Data analysis	May 2023 - March 2025	On track

## **Reasons for Recommendations**

21. To ensure the Council's management and members understand the progress being made throughout the cost-of-living response programme and have an opportunity to provide feedback/suggestions for future work.

## **Options**

1. Cabinet is asked to note the report but has the option to provide additional feedback to officers to further shape the future of the project.

## **Implications**

22. In the writing of this report, taking into account financial, legal, staffing, risk, equality and diversity, climate change, and any other key issues, the following implications have been considered:-

### **Financial and Fraud Risk**

23. The project is on track to be delivered within the £206,000 allocated two-year budget.

### **Climate Change**

24. Many aspects of the project so far have had a positive impact on climate change. Food is a significant contributor to greenhouse gas emissions and the Sustainable Food Network has, and will continue to, reduce food waste in South Cambridgeshire. In addition, the provision of electric blankets will likely result in lower electricity use and associated greenhouse gas emissions.

## **Alignment with Council Priority Areas**

### **25. Growing local businesses and economies**

Many of the projects outlined have been delivered in partnership with the voluntary sector and local businesses. As an example, the Community Hubs service has been, and continues to be, provided by Cambridgeshire ACRE, a local charity. The employment of 3 local 'Village Agents' within this project provides a paid opportunity for local residents.

### **26. Housing that is truly affordable for everyone to live in**

The projects continue to link services such as Local Energy Advice Partnership and other debt and energy advice organisations to residents in need of housing and financial support. Leading to residents gaining access to fuel grants and home improvements which could lead to energy efficiency savings.

## **27. Being green to our core**

Steps have been made to create a sustainable food network, bringing together foodbanks, allotment growing groups and supermarket chains to reduce food waste, and reduce food miles by offering locally grown, unwanted items to local people.

## **28. A modern and caring Council**

This project continues to support those already suffering financial hardship and help prevent those just about managing from falling into debt by offering a range of practical and financial help.

## **Background Papers**

[Support for cost-of-living crisis for South Cambridgeshire residents – 14 November 2023 Cabinet](#)

[Further Support for Cost-of-Living Crisis for South Cambridgeshire Residents – 20 March 2023 Cabinet](#)

## **Appendices**

Appendix A: Cost of Living response evaluation for projects from 14 November 2022 to 31 March 2023

Appendix B: Warm Hubs in Winter in East and South Cambridgeshire Evaluation Report

Appendix C: Cost of Living and Council Tax Support leaflet

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