

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

## 1. Introduction

1.1 On 14 November 2022, Cabinet passed a range of measures, utilising a grant from the Integrated Care Board and South Cambridgeshire District Council (SCDC) reserves, to help ease the cost of living for residents in South Cambridgeshire. This report provides an update on how each project was delivered, the outcome of each project, and where applicable, learnings that have been taken to improve the delivery of services in the next round of cost-of-living related initiatives. Below is a table outlining each project committed to on 14 November 2022, and the budget assigned (some differing from original).

	SCDC Reserve (£)	Integrated Care System (ICS) Grant (£)
Discretionary Housing Payments	100,000	-
Section 13A Discretionary Council Tax Discounts	60,000	-
Electric blankets & slow cookers scheme	-	28,500
Total Warm Hubs project	-	126,000
Food parcel delivery	-	15,000
Warm packs	-	1,500
Community Chest Grant funding	-	20,000
Officer resources	-	20,000

## 2. Charitable giving page

2.1 A [charitable giving page](#) was set up online and raised over £2,000 to help bolster the number of electric blankets and slow cookers we were able to offer to residents. As SCDC is not a registered charity, the Council was not able to access

25% extra through gift aid, and feedback has suggested that more money would have been raised if SCDC had partnered with a local charity for this project. The funds from this page were used to offer an electric blanket and/or slow cooker to more people.

### 3. Electric blankets & slow cookers scheme

3.1 Overall, the project was extremely successful as we were able to provide over 400 people with either a slow cooker or an electric blanket, with many opting to receive both. Eligible residents were selected using existing Council Tax data, with those receiving either an 85%, 70%, or 55% discount being eligible to access this scheme. This cohort of residents were identified as 'just about managing' i.e., people in work who are struggling but do not qualify for other benefits. The remaining stock (after targeting this cohort) was distributed through foodbanks in the district, and social prescribers, to ensure that it reached those in need.

3.2 A feedback form was sent out to all residents who had provided their email address, and 103 responses were received. When asked how many hours a week they used their **electric blanket**, the average answer was 12.6 hours. Using the cost of running an average 24KW boiler as [£2.40](#) an hour, and the average cost of running an electric blanket per hour as [5p](#), we can estimate that on average, every resident that received an electric blanket from us **saved £29.61 per week** if they used their electric blanket for warmth instead of their central heating. That's a total saving of £384.93 if the resident used their blanket from January to March 2023 (13 weeks). In addition to this quantitative data, the anecdotal feedback of this scheme was similarly extremely positive. Some of these comments are below:

*"Love my electric blanket it's instant heat which helps with my aching legs and keeps me warm even after other temperature has been turned off. This blanket has been a god send this winter."*

*"I LOVE my electric blanket. I can cosy up on the couch and don't need to boost the heating in the evenings. I wouldn't be without one now."*

*“It’s kept me warm, I’ve also used it on my bed, it’s made a big difference on my heating and I have managed to keep warm and not use the heating so much and economise and prioritise, so my heating lasts a little bit longer.”*

*“My daughter & I have many movie nights cuddled up. It’s an amazing item to have. Thank you.”*

3.3 The recipients of **slow cookers** provided equally as positive feedback. When asked on a scale of 1 to 5 how useful they have found the slow cooker, 85% of recipients rated it a 4 or a 5. In addition to this, recipients were also asked how much of a noticeable difference using a slow cooker had on reducing their energy bills – 85% of respondents noticed at least some difference in their energy bills. Some anecdotal feedback is provided below:

*“This is great not only saved money but time too, delicious meals”*

*“I’ve saved using the oven for our meals that costs a lot to use, big difference”*

*“Fantastic cooker...great for any meal. I have used this a lot and not only a money saver but a lovely way of cooking healthy meals. I especially like steaming fish in this.”*

3.4 Regarding the electric blankets, we received some feedback towards the end of the project that one large blanket was not enough for larger families. As we had some remaining stocks, we were able to provide over 50 families containing 4 or more people with an extra electric blanket to mitigate for this. Additionally, we received some feedback that slow cookers were not so easy to use for vegetarians, and harder to use in general than the electric blankets, as well as a lower uptake. As we are to repeat this scheme in the future, the evidence would suggest a focus on providing electric blankets might be better as they were more popular, easier to deliver, and made a more tangible difference to many peoples’ lives.

## 4. Warm Hubs

4.1 Warm Hubs were established in places such as: libraries, community centres, church halls, sports clubs, cafés and other places that promise a warm welcome to anyone struggling to heat their home. They were totally free to use, and most venues offered hot drinks, activities and other services, such as free wi-fi. They were able to support vulnerable and isolated people, as well as those on lower incomes who are unable to pay their energy bills without compromising on other essentials, such as food, rent or hygiene.

4.2 A [full external evaluation](#) of this project was undertaken and is available online.

4.3 In total across South Cambridgeshire, 25 Warm Hubs were in operation for a combined total of 2,942 hours and had 101 volunteers who were mostly local to that village. Across all 25 Hubs, there were a total of 9,363 attendee visits from October 2022 to March 2023. The biggest benefit of the Warm Hubs project was that they provided a local space where people who were experiencing loneliness and isolation were able to socialise with others in their village. Using social value calculations, the external evaluation estimates that for every £1 invested into them, the Warm Hubs delivered £4.19 of social value.

4.4 One of the largest barriers to participation in the Hubs was their name and perceived focus. Many individuals did not engage with their local Warm Hub because they believed it was only for people struggling to afford their heating. Although this barrier was gradually overcome through word of mouth in each village, it still hindered numbers. Moving forward, many of the Warm Hubs have evolved into Community Hubs, leaning into the service they provide as a social hub, whilst also continuing to provide a space whereby people can access further support through the cost-of-living crisis as well as access other services which will support health and wellbeing i.e., access to housing and debt advice.

## 5. Food parcel delivery

5.1 To increase access to affordable food, SCDC contracted a local charitable organisation, Hope CIC, to provide food parcels to those in need. These were initially just for those attending Warm Hubs, but this scheme expanded so that any officer at the Council could make a referral for one to be delivered free of charge to any resident in need. After referral, ALL parcels were delivered within 48 hours, and in emergencies they were delivered on the same day. There was capacity to deliver around 300 parcels; 65 were delivered up to 31 March 2023 as this service acted as a last resort. The contract with Hope CIC has been extended so that we can continue to provide this support, with additional money assigned to ensure this can continue. A typical recipient of this service has been someone that has contacted the Council with little, or no food left in their house, and no means of transport to reach their nearest foodbank. Providing a parcel with a weeks' worth of food has provided them a lifeline to ensure that they have food to eat through that particular crisis.

5.2 As an example, we took a referral from Huntingdon Job Centre for a resident in South Cambridgeshire who was living in temporary accommodation. Upon making contact, he told us how he had not eaten properly in over a week and had been surviving on bread for the past couple of days. Even though this first contact was made shortly before 5pm, thanks to the flexibility of Hope CIC, we were able to get a food parcel delivered within 3 hours so that he could eat that evening. Providing a food parcel allowed us to deliver some immediate relief, while also looking at how we could provide longer term support.

## 6. Warm Packs

6.1 In total we were able to provide 100 Warm Packs to residents in South Cambridgeshire. A Warm Pack contained a blanket, hot water bottle, thermos flask, thermal socks, a hat, and gloves. These were handed out discretionally by officers in Environmental Health, Housing, and Communities; some were also provided to foodbanks to reach those in need. Having Warm Packs on hand

provided an extra bit of support that we could provide to residents struggling with fuel poverty and the cost-of-living crisis.

## **7. Community Chest Grant funding**

7.1 £20,000 was assigned to the Community Chest Grant for projects that helped tackle the cost-of-living crisis however only one application for this funding was submitted meaning that over £18,000 remains. This money has rolled over into this financial year and moving forward, the Cost of Living Project Officer has begun working with local community groups to encourage them to put applications forward. Many see the application process as a barrier to bid for funding, but with the help of an officer it is hoped that more applications can be received.