



SOUTH
KESTEVEN
DISTRICT
COUNCIL



Rural and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee

16 March 2023

Report of Councillor Annie Mason,
Cabinet Member for People and Safer
Communities

Cost of Living Update

Report Author

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Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to provide an update regarding the actions taken by the Cost of Living Strategic Working Group and the outcome of the Wellbeing Fair which was held on 25 February 2023.

Recommendations

It is recommended Rural and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

- 1. Consider the report and comment on the potential of future wellbeing fairs across other locations in the district, in order for the Cost of Living Work Group to review viability of any future events.**
- 2. Approval for the Strategic Working Group continue to review the impacts of cost of living and implement activities within the action plan to support businesses and residents of South Kesteven.**

Decision Information

Does the report contain any exempt or confidential information not for publication?	No
What are the relevant corporate priorities?	Healthy and strong communities High performing Council
Which wards are impacted?	All wards

1. Implications

Taking into consideration implications relating to finance and procurement, legal and governance, risk and mitigation, health and safety, diversity and inclusion, safeguarding, staffing, community safety, mental health and wellbeing and the impact on the Council's declaration of a climate change emergency, the following implications have been identified:

Finance and Procurement

- 1.1 The report sets out the specific schemes that are being implemented to support residents with the cost of living – both statutory and national initiatives.
- 1.2 The majority of the schemes identified in the report are not directly funded by the Council. For the administration of some schemes, new burdens funding is provided by central Government. However depending upon the scope of the schemes, then there may be insufficient new burdens funding available.
- 1.3 Those funded by the Council are the Council Tax Support Scheme and Discretionary Council Tax Payments.
- 1.4 The Cost of Living Co-ordinator post is funded through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.

Completed by: Richard Wyles, Chief Finance Officer

Legal and Governance

- 1.5 There are no specific legal implications connected with this report, however all financial support schemes acceptance must follow the agreed process and governance.

Completed by: Graham Watts, Assistant Director of Governance and Monitoring Officer

Risk and Mitigation

- 1.6 The necessary risk issues, logs and mitigations will be identified through the work plans. Cost of Living has been included within the Council's Strategic Risk Register.

Completed by: Tracey Elliott, Governance and Risk Officer

Diversity and Inclusion

- 1.7 Cost of living information is available in a variety of formats to ensure inclusivity. The Wellbeing event was held in a fully accessible venue and publicity of the event was shared with support organisations working with the socio-economically disadvantaged, older people, people with disabilities and people whose first language is not English. Further diversity and inclusion considerations will be identified and complied with as each project/funding stream is accessed.

Completed by: Carol Drury, Community Engagement Manager

Safeguarding

- 1.8 The core actions delivered through the Cost of Living Strategic Working Group are to aid those that are vulnerable to the negative effects of the current cost of living situation.

Completed by: Craig Spence, Acting Director of Housing

Human Resources

- 1.9 The cost of living is having an impact on colleagues as well as the wider community and therefore initiatives such as the Wellbeing Fair were promoted to staff so that they had an opportunity to benefit from the support being offered.

Completed by: Fran Beckitt (HR Manager)

Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing

- 1.10 Mental and emotional wellbeing are interlinked with financial wellbeing and therefore approaches taken to support residents with the increasing cost of living include mental wellbeing support. The Wellbeing Fair hosted by the Council in February included various organisations who signposted local activities, information and advice residents could access to support their mental wellbeing.

Completed by: Fran Beckitt (HR Manager)

2. Background to the Report

- 2.1 On 5 October 2022, a report was presented to this Committee which set out the steps that South Kesteven District Council and partners in the public, voluntary and community sector can take to provide support and advice to those who are being most impacted by the cost of living.
- 2.2 It was recognised that South Kesteven District Councils immediate and future responses needed to be focussed and have clear steps that could be taken further to support businesses and residents in our District.
- 2.3 It was proposed a cross-partner approach to the Cost of Living crisis would be established, which would include an internal Strategic Working Group and an External Taskforce Group for collaborative working.

Cost of Living External Taskforce

- 2.4 On 4 October 2022, the Strategic Working Group facilitated the Cost of Living strategy meeting at the Guildhall Arts Centre, Grantham. The meeting was well represented with key organisations from the business, voluntary and third sector which included: -
- Age UK Lincoln and South Lincolnshire
 - Citizens Advice South Lincolnshire
 - Department for Work and Pensions
 - Federation of Small Businesses
 - Money Advice and Pension Service
 - Nottingham and Lincolnshire Credit Union
 - Wellbeing Lincs
- 2.5 The meeting was opened by the Cabinet Member for People and Safer Communities who shared the vision and purpose of the event. The theme of the meeting was to focus on the need to come together, to better understand the issues businesses and residents are facing. The objective of the meeting was to work in partnership, to ultimately strengthen the local offer of support for businesses and residents, through collaboration and defining outcomes through the Strategic Working Group action plan.
- 2.6 Members of the Strategic Working Group led table discussions with Taskforce attendees to understand what Cost of Living meant for their organisation, which groups of people they felt were most in need of support and if there were any gaps in support, and if so, what they were. A number of Taskforce organisations were able to give local representations of these issues, along with the Department for Work and Pensions providing a national context.

- 2.7 The attendees discussed ways in which the Cost of Living working group could develop to strengthen support for businesses and residents, alongside improving partnership working across Taskforce organisations.
- 2.8 The overriding themes for development included: -
- Ensuring communication of available support is clear and widely accessible and in various formats, such as digital (website, social media, email) and published copy (leaflets, inclusion in publications);
 - Reviewing the provision of food support across the district and explore new opportunities;
 - Understanding the impact the cost of living crisis is having on mental health and emotional wellbeing.
 - Reviewing the provision of accessible spaces for warmth and providing information and guidance on household support fund and energy support schemes;
 - Working with relevant Taskforce organisations to improve the referral process for financial support and debt advice. Ensuring all national and local funding is made available with businesses and residents being made aware;
 - Prevention of homelessness through providing proactive support to tenants and residents;
 - Linking the skills of residents to employment opportunities of businesses within the district.
- 2.9 For all overriding themes, it was recognised South Kesteven District Council would need the support of the Taskforce organisations to ensure the challenges businesses and residents faced could be undertaken together and not in isolation.
- 2.10 A second meeting of the Taskforce organisation group took place on 2 February 2023. The Cabinet Member for People and Safer Communities updated attendees on the activities undertaken so far by the Strategic Working Group and asked whether the impact of Cost of Living had changed since the first meeting in October 2022. The Cabinet Member then introduced the Wellbeing Fair which was taking place on 25 February 2023 where Taskforce organisations were asked for their input and confirmation of attendance.
- 2.11 Taskforce organisations pledged to continue to engage and support the action plan developed by the Strategic Working Group, with responsibility to co-ordinate activities. This group will also report emerging concerns which can be fed back to the Strategic Working Group so appropriate actions can be taken.

Cost of Living Strategic Working Group

- 2.12 The Strategic Working Group is led and chaired by the Cabinet Member for People and Safer Communities and supported by key officers from Communications, Community Engagement, Economic Development, Housing, Human Resources, Revenues, Benefits and Customer Service.
- 2.13 Since 5 October 2022, the Strategic Working Group have met on a weekly basis, ensuring activities are undertaken in accordance with the groups action plan.
- 2.14 The importance of this work has been recognised by the UK Shared Prosperity Fund Board and as a result, recruitment of a fixed term Cost of Living Co-Ordinator has been approved.
- 2.15 A number of key activities have taken place, which are detailed in **Appendix 1** to this report.
- 2.16 Future actions and activities are detailed in **Appendix 2**.

Wellbeing Fair

- 2.17 On 25 February 2023, South Kesteven District Council hosted a Wellbeing Fair at the Jubilee Church Life Centre in Grantham.
- 2.18 The aim of the event was to support the wellbeing of South Kesteven by signposting groups and organisations and providing more information and education about wellbeing. The fair was aimed at helping residents who are concerned about the rising cost of living, as well as providing information and advice about local mental health support and physical wellbeing activities.
- 2.19 A Chef from the Homemade House Cookery School in Grantham demonstrated cooking cost-effective family meals, including providing tasters. Hot drinks and soup were also provided.
- 2.20 The event focused on signposting free health and wellbeing activities in South Kesteven and how residents can access support. Organisations that attended provided advice, information leaflets, games, competitions, and food items.
- 2.21 The organisations that attended were:
- Morrisons
 - Co-op
 - Homemade House Cookery School
 - Shine Lincs
 - Age Concern
 - Renew Grantham

- We Are With You Grantham
- One You Lincolnshire
- LeisureSK
- Inspire +
- Illegal Money Lending Service
- Wellbeing Lincs
- DWP
- Money and Pension Service
- Citizen Advice
- SKDC Revenues and Benefits Team
- Grantham Passage
- SKDC Housing Team
- First Aiders for Mental Health
- Age UK
- Notts and Lincs Credit Union

2.22 The fair was attended by more than 80 visitors and positive feedback was received as part of an exit questionnaire:

- 96% said they now know more about the support available to them.
- 78% said they found the event 'very useful' and a further 13% said they found it 'useful'.
- Comments about the fair included that it was 'well organised [with a] good range of agencies and available support' and that 'it is good to know there is so much support/advice around in this area'.
- The questionnaire also asked about how the cost of living was impacting participants and the answers included 'severely', 'can't afford heating on' and 'struggling'.

2.23 Feedback from the organisations who attended said that as well as supporting residents it was also a 'great network opportunity with other services'.

2.24 Holding the first Wellbeing Fair in Grantham is the first step in a wider plan for supporting residents across South Kesteven. Whilst the feedback from attendees was positive, the Strategic Working Group will undertake a review as to lessons learnt and the viability of future events.

2.25 The Strategic Working Group will also be reviewing the opportunities for attending and integrating into other events across the district for wellbeing support.

Measures of Support provided during 2022/23

- 2.26 Measures of support for households are in place, and these range from statutory support to those announced by Government and the then Chancellor in February, March and May 2022
- 2.27 The support available during 2022/23 is detailed in **Appendix 3** and is broken down into Statutory Support and National initiatives.
- 2.28 In real terms, the value of support administered by South Kesteven District Councils Revenues and Benefits Team so far for 2022/23 is: -
- Statutory Support - £24,177,856
 - National Initiatives - £12,476,437

3. Key Considerations

- 3.1 Members of Rural and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee are asked to consider the report and provide comment regarding potential future wellbeing fairs across other locations in the district.
- 3.2 It is recommended to Rural and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee that the Strategic Working Group continue to review the impacts of cost of living and implement activities within the action plan to support businesses and residents of South Kesteven.

4. Other Options Considered

- 4.1 The Council disband the Cost of Living Strategic Working Group and cease any future activities.

5. Reasons for the Recommendations

- 5.1 The recommendation will ensure businesses and residents of South Kesteven will have access to the support they need, with the Cost of Living Strategic Working Group being able to monitor progress against the action plan.

6. Consultation

- 6.1 The Taskforce Organisation meetings and Wellbeing Fair were two very successful ways to bring businesses, local support organisation and residents together.

7. Background Papers

- 7.1 The following background papers are available to support this report.
- 7.2 5 October 2022 – Rural and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee – Item 22: [Cost of Living Strategy.pdf \(southkesteven.gov.uk\)](https://www.southkesteven.gov.uk/cost-of-living-strategy)

8. Appendices

- 8.1 Appendix 1 – Completed actions by the Strategic Working Group
- 8.2 Appendix 2 – Future actions for the Strategic Working Group
- 8.3 Appendix 3 – Financial support administered by South Kesteven District Councils Revenues and Benefits Team so far for 2022/23