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Telford & Wrekin  
Co-operative Council

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## Borough of Telford and Wrekin

### Business and Finance Scrutiny Committee

Tuesday 20 June 2023

6.00 pm

The Telford Room, Addenbrooke House, Ironmasters Way, Telford, TF3  
4NT

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**Committee Members:** Councillors C R Turley (Chair), Z Hannington (Vice-Chair),  
A J Burford, F Doran, G Luter, S Syrda and P Thomas

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<b>6.0</b>	<b>Cost of Living Update</b>	<b>3 - 18</b>
	To receive a presentation on the cost of living.	

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# Cost of Living strategy update

## 20 June 2023

Agenda Item 6

# Session Outline

- The aim of this session is to provide an up date on the work that has been undertaken to deliver actions within the cost of living strategy that was approved by Cabinet in October 2022 and the progress update that was subsequently reported to Cabinet in March 2023.
- The seven key areas identified in the strategy for priority support are:
  - 1. Energy and utility costs
  - 2. Food, clothing and other essentials
  - 3. Council Tax, money and benefits
  - 4. Health, care and wellbeing
  - 5. Housing
  - 6. Transport
  - 7. Business support

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[Cost of Living Cabinet Report – October 2022](#)

[Cost of Living Strategy – October 2022](#)

[Cost of Living update Cabinet report – March 2023](#)

- To seek members views and suggestions for future cost of living support

# Impact of the Cost of Living crisis

- Inflation in the UK is still extremely high, although now beginning to reduce. In the year to end of April 2023 inflation stood at 8.7%, but had been as high as 11.1% in October 2022
- The cost of some basic food staples, such as grain, have risen by as much as 16.8% over the last year
- Interest rates have been increased to 4.5%, their highest since 2009
- Gas and Electricity prices have risen to unprecedented highs over the last year, but are forecast to fall from July 2023 as the wholesale cost of energy reduces
- Nationally pay has not risen in line with the rate of inflation

# Impact of the Cost of Living crisis

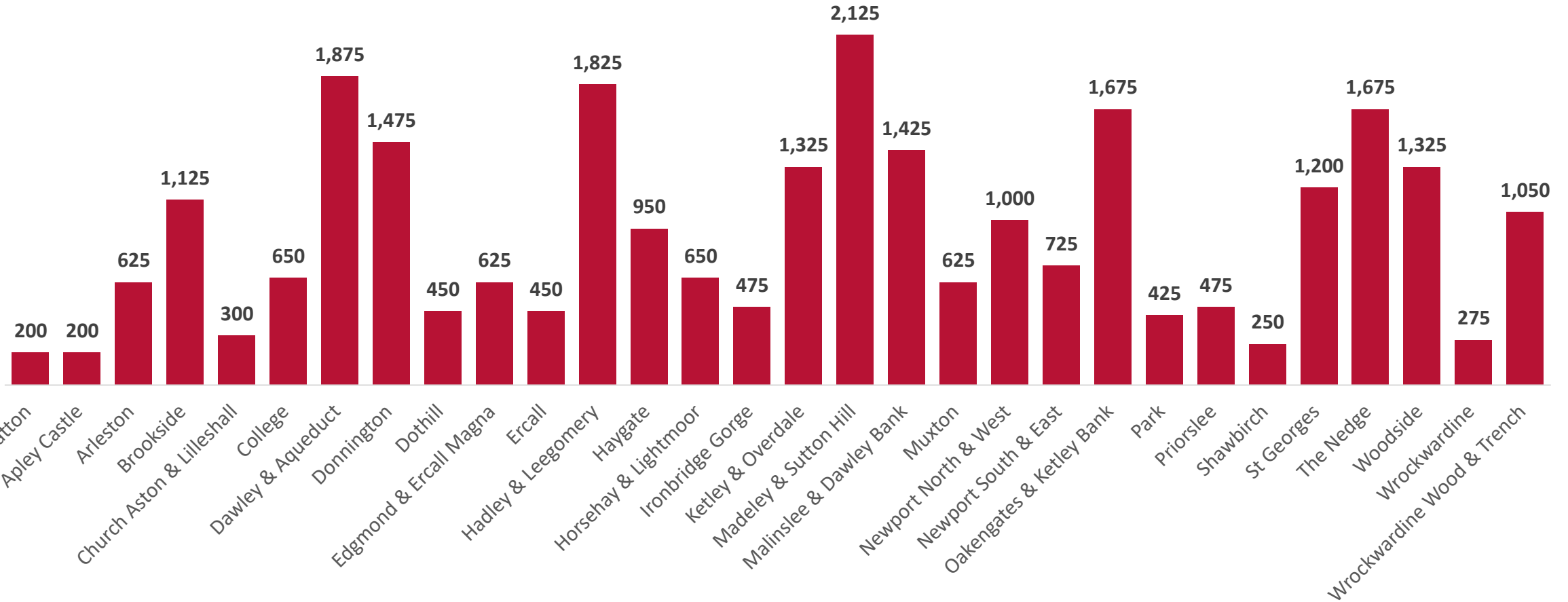
<p><b>Discretionary Housing Payment Applications increased by 32% since last year*</b></p>	<p>The number of people asking for housing and homelessness advice has <b>increased by 22%*</b></p>	<p>Applications for <b>Emergency Welfare Assistance</b> are <b>up by 45%</b> compared with the same period last year*</p>	<p><b>Number of meals provided by Telford Crisis Support and Interfaith Council increased by 27%</b> (332,696 meals)**</p>
<p>The Interfaith Council report that the <b>average cost of them providing a meal has increased from 52p last year to 74p this year i.e. a 42% increase**</b></p>	<p>Number of children helped with a <b>free school uniform increased by 97%**</b></p>	<p><b>Applications for Council Tax Hardship are up by 28%</b> compared with the same period last year*</p>	<p><b>34% increase in referrals to The Wrekin Housing Group's 'Money Matters' and 'Wrekin Debt Advice' teams***</b></p>

\*Figures as at the end of January 2023 \*\* Figures as at end of December 2022 \*\*\* Figures as at end of November 2022

# Where in the borough might people be most affected?

Number of households in ward estimated to have a household income of £0-20k

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# Support for residents with energy costs

- Provision of 4,000 low energy lightbulbs which have been distributed to the households most in need
- Increased funding for the Telford Energy Advice service
- Launch of the 'Better Homes Loan' scheme. Loans of £300 - £8000 to top up loft installation, install energy efficient boilers, or insulate their homes



# Support for residents with food costs

- Provision of school holiday supermarket vouchers to children who would be entitled to income related free school meals – 9,864 vouchers issued each holiday
- One off £150 supermarket voucher to 3,549 pensioners on the lowest incomes
- Discretionary application process for other residents to apply for help if they do not receive a voucher directly
- Additional £90,000 of funding provided to food banks to help with rising demand
- Funding provided to Telford Crisis Support to run ‘cooking on a budget’ sessions including a slow cooker for participants

# Support for residents with Council Tax

- The Council froze general Council Tax again in 2023/24, retaining our position of having the lowest Council Tax in the Midlands
- An additional discount of up to £100 per household off the 2023/24 Council Tax bill of every recipient of help under the Council Tax Reduction scheme
- Continued promotion of the Council Tax Reduction and hardship schemes and flexible payment arrangement options

# Warm and Welcoming Spaces

- Over the winter months, grant funding was provided to community groups and Town and Parish Council's to open 35 warm and welcoming spaces. These provide food, activities and a place for people to socialise in a warm space, saving on their own home energy while they were out. At the peak, attendance was as high as 770 people in a week

## Help to quit smoking

- As well as the significant negative health consequences of smoking, there is a major financial cost to the individual. To help support more residents to quit smoking an additional 3 full-time advisors joined the Healthy Lifestyles Team in January 2023

# Increasing benefit take-up by older residents

- It is known that nationally there are many pensioners who are not receiving all of the benefits and financial help they are entitled to. Over the last year, the Council and its partners have increased its efforts to encourage take up of these benefit entitlements, this has included:
  - Funding to Age UK to enable an expansion of their Benefit Advise Service, which lead to over £1 million of additional benefits being claimed in the Borough
  - The Wellbeing and Independence partnership increased benefit claims by £722,000 between April – December
  - The Financial Case Management Team assisted 1,810 with help and advice regarding benefits and care costs

# Work Express Bus Service

- New Council funded Work Express bus service launched, providing a fast direct route from areas of higher unemployment to key employment sites. High levels of take up of this service which is significantly cheaper and quicker than other existing public transport options

## Free and low-cost activities

- Since October 2022, the Council has continued to provide a wide range of free or low cost activities for residents of the Borough. This includes sporting and fitness activities, community social events, outdoor and nature activities, and arts and culture events

# Support for businesses with energy costs

- Marches Energy Grant, jointly funded with the Marches LEP, provided to local businesses to help address energy efficiency and supply
- Cool Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin provides online resources and consultancy to help businesses improve energy efficiency and sustainability
- Two Cost of Living Business events have been held at which an number of industry leaders and experts were able to provide advice and support on a range of issues connected to energy and efficiency
- Eco grants and Diversification Grants have been funded though Pride in Our High Street to business who have adapted their offer to find new income streams, or to reduce their energy costs
- The Council's Climate Change Fund has continued to support business with initiatives such as installing electric charging points for vehicles

# Support for businesses with business rates

- To support businesses managing their finances we have distributed £94,000 to 44 businesses identified as eligible for Small Business Rate Relief
- We have also promoted the options for business to pay their rates over 12 months rather than 10.

# Raising awareness of cost of living support

- New cost of living webpages [www.telford.gov.uk/costofliving](http://www.telford.gov.uk/costofliving) containing help and support from the Council and it's partners
- Regular and ongoing social media campaigns
- Totally Telford magazine Cost of Living Special launched on October 2022
- Postcard style flyers distributed to residents at events, through doctors surgeries and Shropshire Fire and Rescue, with links to our COL webpage
- A series of online COL awareness sessions were run in November and December for external partners, stakeholders, Town and Parish Councils, community and voluntary sector, as well as front line Council staff
- New cost of doing business microsite launched



# Ongoing support

- School holiday and pensioner supermarket vouchers continuing until March 2024
- Additional funding has been set aside to support the Discretionary Housing Payment and Emergency Welfare Assistance schemes during 2023/24, both of which have seen unprecedented demand
- A further grant has been approved for Age UK to continue its benefit take up work
- Foodbank funding has been increased for the next 12 months

# Questions/discussion