



Telford & Wrekin  
Co-operative Council

Protect, care and invest  
to create a better borough

# Cost of living strategy

**October 2022**





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# Introduction

As a council, we are committed to protect, care and invest to create a better borough, with reducing inequalities across Telford and Wrekin at the heart of our work for more than a decade. This has provided a strong foundation that enabled us to quickly mobilise additional support for our community throughout the Covid pandemic, and other emergencies, such as flooding.

The unprecedented cost of living crisis means that our residents and businesses now need us to be on their side more than ever. Through sustained investment, we have already put in place extensive support, which is summarised in this strategy, and which we will be promoting as widely as possible in the coming months. We have already pulled together lots of useful information and advice for people at [www.telford.gov.uk/costofliving](http://www.telford.gov.uk/costofliving)

However, we know that the rising cost of living will have a greater impact in Telford and Wrekin than in many other areas, due to the high proportion of households in the borough whose annual income will not now provide a minimum acceptable standard of living. We also recognise the impact the crisis is having on our businesses with rising energy, material and transport costs, and the effects of tightening consumer spending posing further risks to the high streets.

The effects of the crisis will not be evenly felt, with certain areas and groups of people in the borough disproportionately impacted. That is why this strategy sets out additional support that we will be delivering to target help where it is most needed. Like everyone, the council itself is being affected by significant cost increases. However despite this, we are prioritising funding this extra support, whilst also freezing Council Tax for the next two years.

As a co-operative council, our response will be delivered in partnership with others, building on the excellent work that many local organisations are already doing to help reduce the worst impacts of the cost of living crisis in their communities.



We will also join with other councils and partners outside of Telford and Wrekin in calling on the Government to take immediate action to help the millions of people up and down the country who are already struggling to make ends meet, and to work with us to deliver long-term solutions that tackle the root causes of poverty and inequality.



**Councillor Shaun Davies**

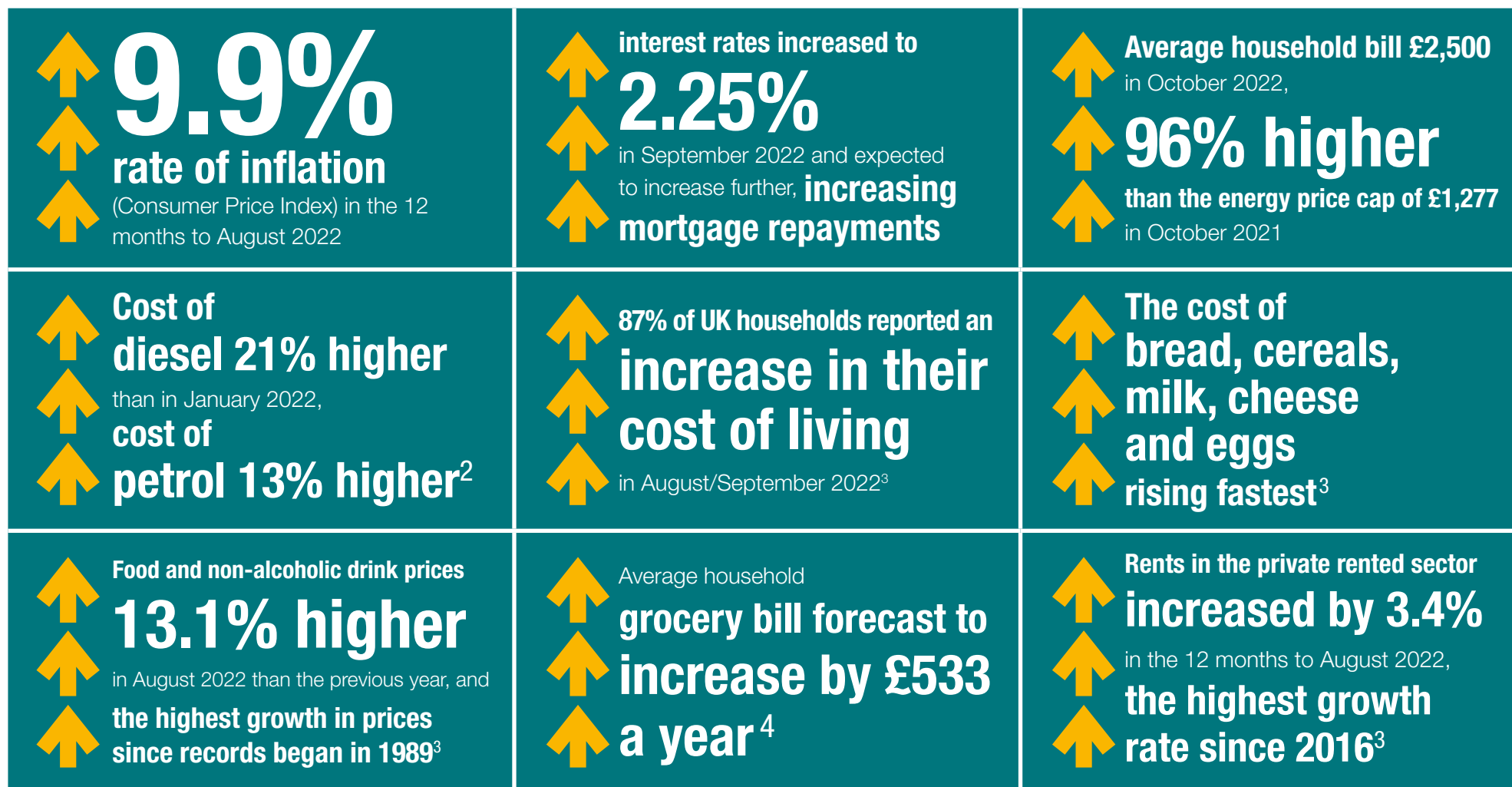
Leader, Telford & Wrekin Council

# The impact of the cost of living crisis

## National impact:

There are many factors converging to cause the current cost of living crisis. In particular, higher energy and food prices are leading to the rate of inflation rapidly increasing.

## Examples of how costs are rising for UK households include:



Even before the winter has started, the rising cost of living is already having an impact. For example, seven million households in May 2022 are estimated to have either gone without food or other essentials over the previous 30 days because they couldn't afford it<sup>5</sup>. In addition, 90% of foodbanks reported an increase in demand between April-August 2022<sup>6</sup>.

The Financial Fairness Trust<sup>7</sup> have also recently published research, which suggested that the number of households in the UK who are in 'serious financial difficulties' had increased from 1 in 10 in October 2021 to one in six in July 2022.

As lower income households spend a larger proportion of their income on energy and food, they will be disproportionately affected by rising prices, as shown by research that 77% of people on benefits are worried about their financial situation, compared to an overall figure of 58%<sup>7</sup>. Other groups that have seen the greatest decline in financial wellbeing are single parents and social and private renters<sup>7</sup>.

The effects of the crisis are not purely financial. Cold homes are linked to a range of health conditions, such as pneumonia, hypothermia and cardiac arrest, and exacerbate others, such as arthritis and asthma. A recent survey by the British Association of Counsellors<sup>8</sup> has also highlighted that two-thirds of their members say that cost of living concerns are causing a decline in people's mental health. The impacts on people's health and wellbeing are wide ranging and strongly influence health inequalities, life expectancy and healthy life expectancy - the years people spend in poor health.

Businesses are also being impacted by rising costs, which comes on the back of Brexit, Covid and associated supply chain issues, and recruitment difficulties now being worsened by the need to match salaries against rising inflation. A national survey of business leaders<sup>9</sup> found that 65% of businesses see the combination of rising energy costs, inflation and cost of living representing the greatest threat in the next six months. Over a quarter were being forced to raise prices, reduce the range of goods and services and pause further investment. Levels of insolvency in June 2022 were 40% higher than at this point in 2021 and 15% above pre pandemic levels<sup>10</sup>.



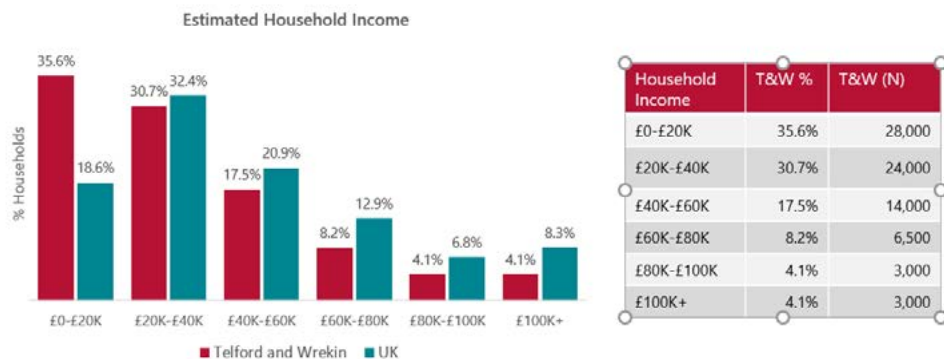
We are experiencing the **highest increase in food prices** since records began

The Federation of Small Business (FSB) report that 96% of small firms cite rising energy costs as their primary concern. The Energy Bill Relief Scheme announced in September 2022 will provide respite for most non-domestic users for six months, but with prices likely to remain high for many months to come, the long term position remains uncertain, with a review to be published in three months' time on support post March 2023.

## Impact in Telford and Wrekin:

The general trends seen nationally are reflected in Telford and Wrekin, however the impact is expected to be greater due to the high numbers of households on low incomes. A single person needs to earn £25,500 and a couple with two children needs to earn £43,400 between them to meet the Minimum Income Standard (MIS) in 2022, calculated by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation<sup>5</sup>. Figure 1 shows that two thirds of households in the borough have an estimated annual income under £40,000. Over a third (35.7%) have a household income below £20,000, almost double the percentage nationally, and well below the minimum acceptable standard of living for even a single person.

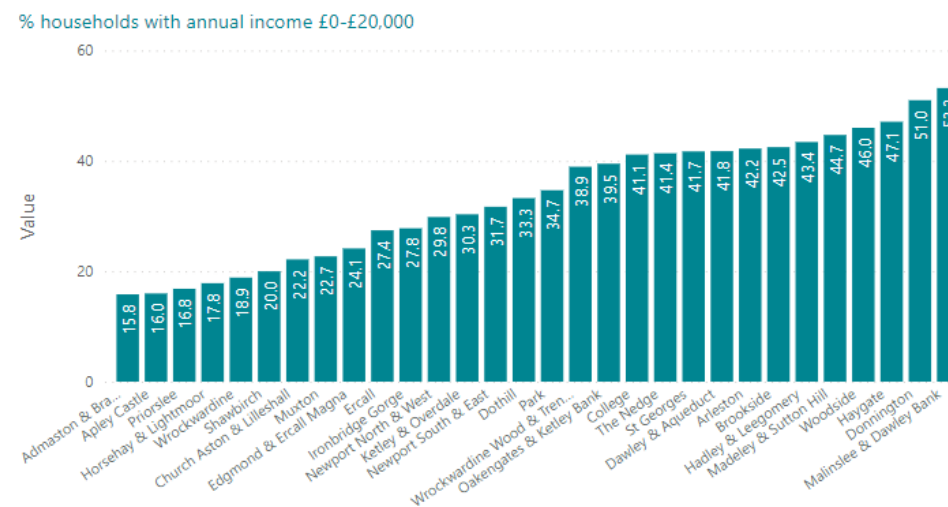
**Figure 1 – Estimated Household Income (Telford & Wrekin/UK)**



There are also likely to be stark contrasts in the impact of the cost of living crisis across the borough, linked to the wide variation in low income households in different areas, as shown in Figure 2. Our data also shows that there will be a need to target help for different age groups in different areas, for example Woodside has the highest levels of child poverty (44%); whereas

for people aged 60+, poverty is highest in Malinslee & Dawley Bank (31%).

**Figure 2 – Percentage of households with annual income £0-£20,000**



We are already starting to see changing demand for council services, such as a significant increase in benefit applications, particularly crisis assistance, and more children coming to school with less money to spend on their school meals (further examples are provided later in this strategy). Partners, such as Telford Crisis Support and Citizens Advice, are reporting similar trends in requests for food parcels and financial advice.

Our life expectancy rates for males and females had stalled in the decade before the pandemic, with rates worse than the national average. Life expectancy is by far the lowest in our most socially deprived communities and the cost of living crisis will directly exacerbate this position.

It is also clear that rising costs are not just affecting residents, we are increasingly getting feedback that local organisations are struggling financially.

Challenges are hitting businesses of all sizes and sectors, but particularly small and medium enterprises (SMEs) which account for 98% of



Businesses such as hospitality  
are struggling financially  
and are still fragile post Covid

employment in Telford and Wrekin (compared to 60% nationally). This includes many high street and hospitality businesses still fragile post Covid. Alongside this, Telford's dominant manufacturing base includes many high energy users, who have reported energy price rises of up to 400%<sup>11</sup>.

The local community and social enterprise sector has grown during Covid, providing key services and facilities in the heart of communities, many of which are trying to sustain cost of living support to residents. However, these are often very small organisations that are not eligible for national grant support or need revenue rather than capital support to keep their premises open.

In order to track the effects of the cost of living crisis at a local level, and to evaluate the impact of the support we are providing, we are developing a data dashboard to ensure that our approach is effectively targeted and evidence led.

### References:

1. Bank of England (27 September 2022)
2. Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy weekly road fuel prices (26 September 2022)
3. Office for National Statistics
4. Research by Kantar, reported in the 'Rising cost of living' House of Commons Research Briefing (September 2022)
5. Joseph Rowntree Foundation 'Going without; deepening poverty in the UK' & 'A Minimum Income Standard for the UK in 2022' (2022)
6. Independent Food Aid Network, reported in the 'Rising cost of living' House of Commons Research Briefing (September 2022)
7. Financial Fairness Trust Financial Impact Tracker survey, conducted by the University of Bristol (July 2022)
8. British Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy survey (August 2022)
9. BDO UK survey (July 2022)
10. British Business Bank (June 2022)
11. Make UK

# Our approach

Our approach to tackling the cost of living crisis is based on four elements:

- a) Directly **providing targeted support** to help residents and organisations most affected by the cost of living crisis;
- b) Working in partnership to **coordinate support locally and maximise the impact**;
- c) **Raising awareness of the support that is available** across Telford and Wrekin;
- d) With partners and other local authorities, **making the case to Government for increased and sustained investment into long-term solutions** to the cost of living crisis.

## a) Our support

We are already taking action across seven key areas, providing help with:

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



We are supporting residents with **help in seven key areas**



The following sections summarise what we have already been providing and also additional support that we will put in place over the next 6-12 months. This strategy is a live document, and we will continue to develop our plans to reflect local needs.

## 1. Help with energy and utility costs

### We have:

- ✓ Distributed the £150 energy rebate to all households living in Band A-D properties.
- ✓ Used our own funding to award an additional automatic £100 energy rebate to those living in Band E properties, and £150 to people living in higher bands who need help to pay their Council Tax because they are on low incomes, benefiting an extra 5,243 households in total.
- ✓ Set up a discretionary energy rebate scheme, supporting eligible households who had not received help through the original scheme, for example those that had moved into a Band A-D property after 1 April.
- ✓ Provided gas and electric vouchers to 862 people on low incomes on pre-paid meters in an emergency situation since April 2022, using our locally funded emergency welfare assistance.
- ✓ Allocated £70,000 funding to support residents in need with emergency boiler repairs.
- ✓ In partnership with Marches Energy Agency, introduced free Telford Energy Advice (TEA) home visits and online energy efficiency advice for residents.
- ✓ Installed insulation in 56 homes as part of a £520,000 pilot scheme in Sutton Hill, targeted at households with low incomes and the poorest energy efficiency (see Harry's story).

### Harry's story, a pensioner aged 87:

Harry is one of the residents in Sutton Hill who has benefited from Local Authority Delivery Scheme funding secured by the council. Harry's home has been fitted with new external wall and loft insulation, which as well as making it warmer in the winter and cooler in the summer, will also help to lower his energy costs. Harry said:

*"The house used to get very cold...when I heard about this funding for my insulation I was delighted, as it has needed doing for some time. The support I've received from Telford & Wrekin Council and Telford Energy Advice has been really good"*

### We will:

- Directly refer residents who have applied to us for a welfare payment and are on low incomes to Severn Trent Water who have agreed to automatically apply their Big Difference scheme water bill discount (up to £300 saving on an average bill).
- Distribute free low energy (LED) lightbulbs to provide immediate practical assistance with energy costs (lighting makes up 11% of a household's electricity use, and LED bulbs would reduce this by 80%, saving residents up to £60 a year). We will trial distribution of 2,000 bulbs through community collection points and partners, such as Wrekin Housing Group, and invest £30,000 of our own climate change funding to scale up if successful to provide bulbs/warm packs to up to an additional 2,600 households in areas of high fuel poverty, connecting recipients to longer-term help.

- Deliver a £1.44m grant-funded programme of insulation works, including both borough wide (100+ homes) and targeted schemes (44 homes in Donnington). Supplementing this with £0.4m of our own climate change funding, we will upgrade eligible homes to the highest possible standard of energy efficiency for these properties.
- Publish a Climate Change Planning Guidance Document, covering both new build and retrofit of existing properties.
- Upgrade the energy efficiency of homes where there is no way of getting onto mains gas, particularly in rural areas (£231,000 grant funding available).
- Retrofit our least energy efficient temporary accommodation properties with insulation, funded through our Climate Action Community Investment with the help of local investors. This will reduce energy costs and make homes warmer for residents who have been homeless or at risk of homelessness.



Household grocery bills are expected, on average, to increase by **£533 a year**

## 2. Help with food, clothing and other essentials

### We have:

- ✓ Awarded Free School Meals to 9,520 children from low income households (a 48% increase on pre pandemic levels).
- ✓ Provided supermarket vouchers to help with the cost of food for children on Free School Meals during every school holiday – equivalent to £330 for a family with two children over the last year.
- ✓ Awarded supermarket vouchers to pensioners and families with children on the lowest incomes, in total benefiting 10,929 households since April 2022 (see feedback from residents).
- ✓ Introduced a discretionary support fund that anyone in exceptional hardship can apply for, with 393 residents already benefiting since July 2022.
- ✓ Supported 994 people in crisis who have applied for emergency welfare assistance since April 2022 (a 117% increase on 2021), providing people with essential items such as beds, clothes and white goods.
- ✓ Put in place three-year partnership agreements with Telford Crisis Support (TCS) and Telford and Wrekin Interfaith Council (TWIC) to deliver seven-day a week borough-wide foodbank provision, providing 138,374 free meals across Telford and Wrekin since April 2022.
- ✓ Given £47,000 in supermarket vouchers to 18 community cafes across the borough to help them with rising food costs so that they can continue to offer low cost meals.
- ✓ Provided funding to Telford Crisis Support to run a school uniform and clothing scheme, benefiting 1,593 children over the last year.

## Feedback from residents who have had help with food:

We have had so much positive feedback from residents who have benefited from support with food and other essentials that it's difficult to pick out one story – here is a just a selection of messages we've received over the last few months:

G received emergency gas, electric and supermarket vouchers to buy food for her family in September 2022. She said:

*"Thank you so so much, I truly appreciate your help. I couldn't see a way out and was starting to panic, I have had a few nights of no sleep so this means more to me than you know".*

Mrs D, a pensioner, received a supermarket voucher in September 2022. Mrs D said:

*"In times like this when I have felt forgotten and when we are all struggling, I cannot thank you enough. This will go a long way to help ends meet as I have a food allergy and my food is dearer than the norm".*

J, received discretionary support in July 2022. She said:

*"I just need to write to say thank you for your amazing support team. Today I received a call from you, and I was so taken aback I haven't stopped crying, the kindness is overwhelming. The young lady who called me has given me a food voucher. I am so overcome. I have worked hard all my life and now at 74 years old I am in poor health. So today when this act of kindness came it made me very, very grateful".*

## We will:

- Continue to provide supermarket vouchers for children on Free School Meals up to and including Easter 2023, and make a further one-off award of vouchers to pensioners on the lowest incomes in January 2023.
- Provide £90,000 additional funding to enable four food banks that provide free food in the borough to buy more food to help with rising demand and falling donations.
- Immediately invest an additional £128,000 into the emergency welfare assistance budget to meet the rapidly increasing demand from people in crisis and to prevent support being rationed.
- Freeze the prices of school meals for this school year to help parents who pay for their child's meal<sup>1</sup>. We will also take part in a pilot study with the Food Standards Agency and Department for Education to ensure schools are providing food that meets the school food nutrition standards.
- Work with Harper Adams University to set up online cooking on a budget guides.'
- Working with schools, launch a Free School Meals campaign to promote universal Free School Meals for children in Key Stage 1, ensure that eligible families register for Free School Meals for children at the end of Key Stage 1, and that their children regularly take up the free meal at school.
- Work with schools to implement new statutory guidance that promotes use of limited branded school uniform items and ensuring there is more than one uniform supplier.
- Carry out an audit of organisations offering low cost meals and publish this on the council's cost of living web-pages.

<sup>1</sup> For schools who use the council for school meals – some schools use other providers.

### 3. Help with Council Tax, money and benefits

#### We have:

- ✓ Frozen Council Tax for two years from 2022/23, building on our track record of having the lowest Council Tax in the Midlands for many years.
- ✓ Helped people on low incomes pay their Council Tax through our local Council Tax Reduction scheme (13,579 people receiving Council Tax Reduction in August 2022).
- ✓ Continued to use our own funding to provide Council Tax hardship payments to those who can't afford the shortfall between the Council Tax Reduction they receive and the Council Tax charged, helping 368 applicants since April 2022 (a 36% increase on 2021).
- ✓ Developed a range of options to help residents pay their Council Tax, from spreading payments over 12 months instead of the statutory 10 months, to offering everyone issued with a summons for non-payment a new payment arrangement.
- ✓ Invested £232,000 funding a year for 3 years in Citizens Advice Telford & the Wrekin, helping them to give specialist and general debt and other advice to 7,650 people in 2021/22, including via direct referral from the council.
- ✓ With partners, published guides on the financial support and advice available for both pensioners and working age residents.

#### We will:

- Provide a one-off reduction to Council Tax bills to be sent out in March 2023 for all households that receive Council Tax Reduction due to being on low incomes.
- Offer residents a Council Tax payment holiday option in January 2023 for April and May bills, to help during the period immediately after high winter bills.
- Write directly to pensioners who we believe may qualify for Pension Credit Guarantee Credit, which could be worth over £3,300 per household per year.
- Hold monthly debt surgeries across the borough.
- Review the recovery process for residents on the lowest incomes who get into arrears with their Council Tax, including an additional reminder, extended payment period, and reduced court fees.



## 4. Help with health, care and wellbeing

### We have:

- ✓ Invested £1.84m over five years into a free information and advice service for adults with care and support needs, delivered by the Well-being and Independence Partnership, a group of agencies in Telford and Wrekin. For people aged over 65, Age UK support with benefits advice, and helped 99 older people between April-June 2022 claim £432,603 in welfare benefits.



**87% of UK households reported an increase in their cost of living in August/September 2022**

- ✓ Provided advice on cost effective measures to support people to live independently through the Independent Living Centre in Telford town centre and the virtual house, which takes residents on an interactive tour to see examples of assistive technology and sensory aids that help with daily activities around the home.
- ✓ Provided financial advice to 2,895 residents in receipt of care, including help to apply for benefits, between April-August 2022.
- ✓ Continued to develop Live Well Telford, our all age community online directory, for example adding a one-stop shop of information about how to get online for free in Telford and Wrekin.
- ✓ With partners and schools, delivered our Happy Healthy & Active Holiday scheme, providing free holiday club places for 1,646 children from low income families in summer 2022.
- ✓ Run a wide range of calm cafes, in partnership with voluntary and community organisations, such as Telford Mind, and a focused project for black adults requiring mental health support.
- ✓ Launched a year of wellbeing campaign, with 3,200 residents and 73 organisations to date signing a pledge to receive tips and information over 12 weeks on how to improve their own, or their employees, wellbeing – 95% of people who took part said that they now felt more motivated to look after their wellbeing.
- ✓ Organised a wide range of free or low cost weekly youth and community activities through our Safer Stronger Communities programme (12 wards across Telford and Wrekin), from Friday night football to line dancing.
- ✓ Extended free swimming in council pools to all young people under 25 and delivered 672 free places on learn to swim holiday courses.

- ✓ Funded more than 1,200 children from low income families to take part in outdoor activities at Arthog Outdoor Education Centre.
- ✓ Delivered an expanded programme of free community events across the borough, including Love Telford, Spring into St Georges, High Street Celebrations, Armed Forces Day, Telford Balloon Fiesta, and a whole weekend of festivities for the Queen's Platinum Jubilee, including 50 community events across Telford and Wrekin funded by a council-run grant scheme.
- ✓ Launched a new free iPad loan scheme at Southwater library, adding to free access to library computers, Wi-Fi, books, audio items and online resources enjoyed by >32,000 library members, as well as providing welcoming and accessible spaces for all.
- ✓ Improved the support for people affected by domestic abuse, including expanding safe accommodation options.
- ✓ Extended treatment and recovery services for people who use alcohol and other drugs.
- ✓ Offered targeted community health improvement services and advice, such as Covid vaccinations and mini health checks through Betty the Bus.
- ✓ Provided grant funding, totalling £100,000, to 25 voluntary sector organisations to deliver projects to reduce health inequalities in their local community.

#### **We will:**

- Invest £150,000 into a new cost of living community grant scheme. Grants of up to £5,000 will be available to community groups, town and parish councils, and schools, to put on new or extend existing activities and provide meals or refreshments at their buildings, and to provide a welcoming space where people can socialise and get cost of living information.

- Carry out targeted work with an additional 200 residents in receipt of care and support to ensure that they are maximising the take-up of benefits that are due to them.
- Launch 10 by 10, a campaign as part of our on your side investment programme to encourage children to try 10 activities before they reach the age of 10. This will include the offer of a free initial 13-week block of swimming lessons for children in Telford and Wrekin aged 10 and under. The programme will be open to all and will provide up to 1,000 courses per year for two years.
- Increase promotion of our free Quit Smoking and other Healthy Lifestyle services as a way for residents to save money, alongside improving their physical health and relieving stress and anxiety (see Natalia's story).
- Commission the new integrated domestic abuse service to better meet local need.

#### **Natalia's story, a local resident:**

Natalia quit smoking with help from Catherine, one of the council's Healthy Lifestyle Advisors. Natalia was undergoing medical treatment, which required her to be a non-smoker, and so her GP referred her to the Healthy Lifestyle Service. Although saving money wasn't Natalia's initial reason to quit smoking, she is aware of how much difference it has made to her finances. Natalia said:

*"Like a lot of people, I pay for everything by card. And when you see your monthly card statement you realise just how much you are spending... My cigarettes cost me over £4,000 a year".*

## 5. Help with housing

### We have:

- ✓ Supported people on low incomes get help with their rent through Housing Benefit (8,172 people on Housing Benefit in August 2022).
- ✓ Targeted the use of our Discretionary Housing Payment fund to support 618 residents in need to avoid eviction from their home, secure long-term sustainable accommodation, or move to more suitable, affordable accommodation (see CE's story).
- ✓ Placed 155 people in emergency accommodation and opened another emergency provision to support and house people who are rough sleeping.
- ✓ Provided homelessness advice for 1,350 people since April 2022, and introduced a Homeless Buddies initiative to better support people in need.
- ✓ Worked with our Registered Provider partners to increase the number of social houses available to those homeless or threatened with homelessness.
- ✓ Launched Telford & Wrekin Homes providing refurbished rented properties including for those on Local Housing Allowance.
- ✓ Through Nuplace, delivered 447 properties, with a further 437 planned or in delivery, providing private rented homes for life, including adapted and specialist accommodation.
- ✓ Provided advice to more than 200 private rented tenants to prevent homelessness.
- ✓ Committed £1.8m funding to carry out adaptations to enable disabled people to stay in their own homes.

- ✓ Delivered a third of all new housing as affordable housing units, including homes for rent and shared ownership properties.

### CE's story, a local resident:

CE, who was pregnant, was placed in our refuge due to threats of domestic abuse to her and her unborn child. Whilst at the refuge, CE had no items for her baby, so our support worker applied to Telford Crisis Support on her behalf, and she received a new baby hamper. CE was then able to move to a partner's safe house and went on to be successfully nominated by the council to be housed by a registered social landlord, made possible by financial help from a Discretionary Housing Payment which paid CE's initial rent in advance.

### We will:

- Review the allocation of Discretionary Housing Payment funding depending on the outcome of the review by the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP have set money aside to potentially increase funding once councils submit their mid-year returns).
- Work with Telford & Wrekin homes, to develop more affordable homes for rent.
- Launch a new Landlord & Tenant Support Programme to provide a one stop shop for advice and information.
- Through our Homes for All Supplementary Planning Document, influence the delivery of more affordable, adaptable and specialist homes on new developments across the borough.
- Use our Housing Intervention Fund to invest in stalled housing sites to deliver more affordable and specialist accommodation.
- Work with Registered Providers to encourage opportunities for tenants to downsize where appropriate.

## 6. Help with transport

### We have:

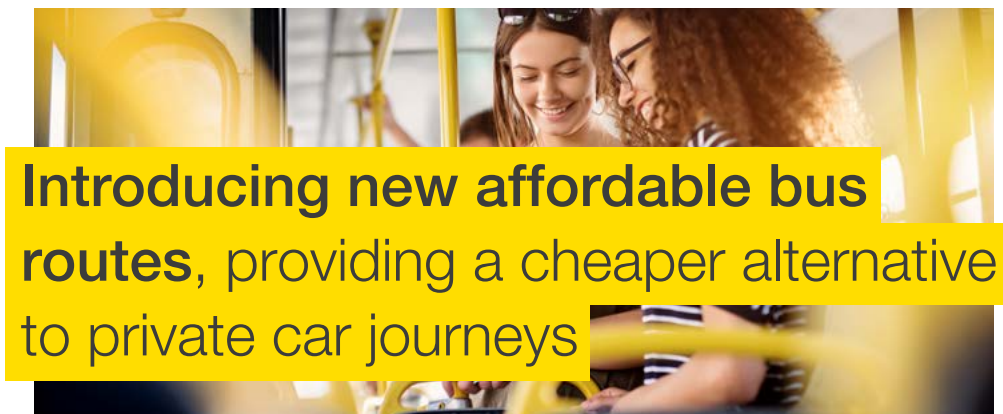
- ✓ Supported eligible residents to access concessionary travel, including free local bus travel at certain times of day (25,128 people with a concessionary travel pass in August 2022).
- ✓ Provided 75 young people aged 16-19 with free Teen Travel Cards, giving discounts on weekly bus tickets.
- ✓ Run our Dial-a-Ride scheme, an affordable door to door transport service for people over 70 with mobility problems.
- ✓ Funded subsidies to ensure 12 bus routes in the borough continue to operate, giving residents an affordable alternative to private car journeys.
- ✓ Re-opened Telford Bike Hub in Telford Town Park which has delivered over 70 free biking activities during summer 2022, including learn to ride sessions and cycle maintenance workshops, in order to encourage residents to cycle more to school and work.
- ✓ Provided three 'Cycle Stations' to provide high quality cycle parking in Wellington, Oakengates and Telford town centre.
- ✓ Created a new 2km cycling and walking link along the A518 to enable off road walking and cycling between Donnington and Newport.
- ✓ Undertaken initial maintenance work on the Silkin Way walking and cycling corridor, supporting use for commuting and leisure journeys.

### We will:

- Commission a new Work Express bus link, providing an affordable, direct and fast route between Madeley, Sutton Hill and Brookside, and

the main industrial estates at Halesfield, Stafford Park and Hortonwood, with fares capped at £2 for an adult single fare. The service will also divert at school times to help pupils in South Telford to get to Telford Priory School.

- Introduce three other new affordable bus routes to improve access to employment and reduce journey times for school pupils.
- Invest £250,000 into safer routes to schools as part of the council's on your side investment programme, to encourage more families to walk or cycle to school.
- Continue our £1.2m investment into the Silkin Way to encourage more use of this key 14 mile north to south walking and cycling corridor.
- Continue to implement high quality, secure cycle parking across the borough.
- Invest a further £500,000 into bus stops and real-time information as part of the council's on your side investment programme, to encourage more people to use local bus services.
- Deliver more active travel training, including a programme of events from the Bike Hub in October half term, outreach events into local communities and Bikeability training in our schools.





## 7. Help for businesses

### We have:

- ✓ **Provided direct financial support & advice**
- ✓ Supported 1,800 businesses and individuals with on line or face to face advice to locate in the borough or expand, move, recruit, diversify or address challenging business conditions. Advice is free, tailored to business need and account managers support with links to other council services, financial, business and specialist support.
- ✓ Supported businesses to offset costs, expand their businesses and install energy measures through access to the Business Growth Programme (BGP), Business Energy Efficiency Programme (BEEP) and Small Equipment Fund. To date, in excess of £2million investment has been secured, supporting businesses to stabilise and grow, with the creation of more than 220 jobs and with a pipeline of projects set to create further jobs.
- ✓ Directly provided a range of Revive & Thrive Grants across our main high streets through £854,857 Pride in Our High Street (PIOHS) funding, attracting over £2million of match funding. To date, we have supported 145 businesses to take on empty properties, improve facades and signage, diversify or address digital transformation. This includes 11 eco grants to help businesses become more sustainable and to reduce their energy costs.
- ✓ Awarded £131,000 of climate change grants to 35 local community groups and businesses to reduce their carbon footprint and energy costs. Funding has been increased to £200,000 for a second round of grants, set to support a further 34 applicants.

- ✓ Provided free one to one specialist support to businesses of all sizes to address specific business issues. This includes signposting to Cool Shropshire & Telford, a free online portal for small and medium enterprises leading to in-person advice to help reduce emissions, fuel bills and waste, which is jointly funded by Telford & Wrekin Council and Shropshire Council.
- ✓ Worked with the Telford & Wrekin Climate Change Partnership to engage businesses to share best practice through a Resource Energy Cluster.
- ✓ Worked with Make UK (UK representative body for manufacturing), BEIS (Department of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy) and a consortium of local tier 1 automotive suppliers to identify opportunities for sustainable energy supply.
- ✓ Supported businesses with the cost of Business Rates through Small Business Rate Relief, and by offering payment over 12 months rather than 10, with bespoke payment arrangements to support customers in difficulties.
- ✓ Provided hot desking opportunities in communities, including through Workplace Telford and council libraries.

## Aurora Sports Performance's story:

Aurora Sports Performance is a high performance training centre for elite athletes, sports clubs and businesses in Newport. The company was helped by the council's Business Support Service (Enterprise Telford) to secure grant funding to assist with combining and upgrading two units in Newport, including lighting, heating and energy systems that will provide substantial savings on energy bills, as well as supporting investment in vital new equipment. Richard Harris from the company said:

*"In the current climate launching Aurora wouldn't have been possible at this level of service without the support of Enterprise Telford (Telford & Wrekin Council)... With energy prices rising dramatically, this couldn't have come at a better time and will provide major savings in our energy costs".*

### ✓ Connected Businesses

- ✓ Launched Hello Telford [www.hellotelford.co.uk](http://www.hellotelford.co.uk) a new online platform for local businesses to connect, buy and collaborate locally reducing costs, sharing best practice and keeping spend in the borough. With over 100 businesses registered since the launch in July this is encouraging businesses to access local supply chain, access and share training opportunities to upskill staff and provides a platform to share information and advice about energy measures.

- ✓ Developed a new mytlc app, which provides access to offers and discounts from hundreds of local businesses. The app helps residents who shop local to save money, whilst also connecting businesses to potential customers, keeping the 'Telford pound' within the borough.

### ✓ Used our procurement powers

- ✓ Delivered value back into communities by including a requirement for a social value contribution in all contracts over £10,000, both financial and in kind support e.g. labour and materials to help social enterprises and charities to support residents (see Veolia's story).
- ✓ Enabled local providers to bid for contracts by publishing our procurement intentions and establishing a Dynamic Purchasing System (DPS) which local providers can join. This is a flexible procurement tool, which suppliers can join at any time.

### ✓ Supported Business with Recruitment

- ✓ Helped to address the local recruitment challenge, including by the promotion of vacancies through Job Box and the Work Local Initiative, which aims to get people working closer to where they live.

## Veolia's story:

Through our contract with Veolia to deliver waste services, we have secured a wide range of community benefits. For example, Veolia are providing £15,000 of funding for community projects through their Envirogrant scheme, £10,000 for support services like Citizens Advice, and also helping charities to reuse pre-loved furniture for their clients.

### ✓ **Cut red tape to de-risk investment**

- ✓ Invested through our Land Deal and Growth Fund to de-risk sites for development, as well as linking investors with grants for equipment and premises, support for recruitment and training, links to supply chain and offering a streamlined planning process.

### **We will:**

- Extend and increase the value of Pride in Our High Street eco grants to up to £1,500 to support our High Street businesses. The eco grants will come with one to one support to help businesses to pick from a schedule of costed energy saving measures provided through local suppliers. For businesses looking to add ceiling or wall insulation to their premises, eco grants of up to £5,000 will be available.
- Promote new Marches Energy Grants, which will provide 40% grants from £1,000 to £20,000 for energy efficiency and renewable energy measures across all sectors, including community organisations.
- Explore opportunities to work with businesses to encourage local purchasing, and to promote the use of local suppliers linked with grant funding wherever possible.
- Work with Cool Shropshire & Telford to extend take up of their health checks and put in place additional targeted support through our UK Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF) investment strategy for smaller and community enterprises.
- Launch a campaign to promote Small Business Rate Relief and extended payment arrangements to increase take up.
- Offer a Business Rates payment holiday option in January 2023 for April and May bills, where businesses are up to date with payments.

- Deliver a programme of 'cost of business' events targeted across different sectors and sizes of business, including a focus on our larger businesses with strong supply chain links and opportunities for collaboration.
- Hold an Energy Showcase with partners, including Midlands Energy Hub and local businesses, to showcase information, advice, best practice and financial support across all sectors, including community enterprises.
- Review opportunities to extend our flexible procurement system (DPS) to other companies to encourage wider local procurement across the public sector.

### **b) Working in partnership**

As a Co-operative Council, we are committed to working together with our residents, partners and local organisations to collectively deliver the best we can in Telford and Wrekin.

Our strong relationships give us a greater understanding of what is happening across the borough, allow us to pool our knowledge and resources, and to target support and funding where it will have the most impact. An example of this is the Health & Wellbeing Board, who have prioritised the cost of living crisis and inequalities in their new strategy.

Section a) of this strategy gives examples of organisations we are collaborating with on the cost of living crisis, however this is not an exhaustive list, and largely focuses on services that we jointly deliver or provide funding towards.

There are many other organisations using their own resources to deliver valuable support, ranging from schools setting up community fridges to Registered Social Landlords providing warm packs to tenants on low incomes. In order to build up a picture of what is already happening and to identify where there may be opportunities to join up, we will continue to work with key networks and partners, including West Mercia Police,

Town & Parish Councils, the Chief Officer Group for the Voluntary and Community Sector, Chamber of Commerce, Federation of Small Business and Telford Business Board.

### **c) Raising awareness of the support available**

As set out in this strategy, there is already extensive cost of living support being provided in Telford and Wrekin by the council, partners, voluntary and community organisations, schools, businesses and residents. We are well placed to help signpost people to the right help, and distribute information quickly on the support that is available, which is especially important when the situation is rapidly changing.

#### **The main ways we are doing this are by:**

- Running a cost of living communications campaign for residents in two phases. The first phase will focus on promoting the support available for those that need help in bite size video messages, targeted through social media to areas of the borough with the most households on low incomes. The second phase will move on to a ‘help if you can’ campaign for residents and organisations who want to do their bit to support others.
- Developing a ‘Cost of Business’ communications campaign to promote all of the offers, advice and information available for businesses, with a one stop shop micro-site linking to other webpages and social media platforms to reach businesses we work with across the council e.g. via Trading Standards, Planning, our tenants and representative business organisations.
- Launching cost of living web-pages [www.telford.gov.uk/costofliving](http://www.telford.gov.uk/costofliving) with advice on four key areas – benefits and finance, bills and affordable warmth, food, and wellbeing. Recognising that not everyone can get online, we will also provide hard copies of this information in council and community buildings.

- Sending a special cost of living edition of the Totally Telford magazine with practical information and advice to every household in the borough from mid-October.
- Piloting cost of living roadshows in Donnington and Dawley through our Safer Stronger Communities Team to provide face to face advice to residents.
- Targeting direct communications to eligible non-claimants to encourage take-up of:
  - Free School Meals
  - Pension Credit
  - Small Business Rates Relief
- Developing a cost of living training programme for front line staff and volunteers from the council, partner organisations and community groups. The training will enable us to develop a network of cost of living community champions, who will know how to signpost people they come into contact with to support.

### **d) Making the case to Government**

Many of the challenges facing our residents and businesses require national action and investment beyond the council’s powers and finances. We are determined to make the voice of our community heard, will intervene where we can, and with the Local Government Association (LGA) and others, lobby Government to deliver lasting solutions to the cost of living crisis.

## Our 12 Asks of Government are to:

- 1** **Increase welfare payments for pensioners and working age people** in line with the rising cost of living, and immediately reinstate the £20 uplift to Universal Credit.
- 2** **Confirm Household Support Funding for councils beyond April 2023.**
- 3** **Reverse cuts to the Discretionary Housing Payment Fund.**
- 4** **Provide free school breakfast clubs for all primary school pupils.**
- 5** **Ensure immediate action is taken to support mortgage holders who are facing dramatic increases in interest rates.**
- 6** **Increase councils' powers to deal with rogue landlords and invest in new small-scale local private rented accommodation provision using trusted community partners.**
- 7** **Accelerate the insulation of existing homes**, bring forward implementation of the Future Homes Standard to reduce the running costs and carbon emissions of all new homes, and increase the investment and subsidy on energy saving plant for businesses.
- 8** **Allow more flexibility in how Levelling Up funding can be used to enable councils to target resources most effectively.**
- 9** **Extend the protection provided by the Energy Bill Relief Scheme for non-domestic users across all sectors beyond six months.**
- 10** **Devolve national employment and skills schemes to councils** to better target support to help people find work and businesses to fill vacancies.
- 11** **Increase the scale of UK Shared Prosperity Fund allocated to councils** to enable successful grant programmes for businesses at a level equivalent to former EU grant programmes.
- 12** **Invest more into partnerships with councils to deliver long-term solutions** to preventing poverty and tackling inequalities, and provide sufficient additional Government funding to meet the growing cost pressures impacting on council budgets.

