



Borough of Telford and Wrekin

Cabinet

16 March 2023

Cost of Living Strategy Progress Update

Cabinet Member:	Cllr Shaun Davies - Leader
Lead Director:	Felicity Mercer – Director: Communities, Customer and Commercial Services
Service Area:	Council Wide
Report Author:	Lee Higgins – Delivery Manager: Customer Relationship & Financial Welfare Services
Officer Contact Details:	Tel: 01952 383835 Email: lee.higgins@telford.gov.uk
Wards Affected:	All Wards
Key Decision:	Not key
Forward Plan:	Not Applicable
Report considered by:	SMT – 14 February 2023 Business Briefing – 2 March 2023 Cabinet – 16 March 2023

1.0 Recommendations for decision/noting:

Cabinet is asked to:

- 1.1 Note the impact that the cost of living crisis is having on the residents and businesses of the Borough.
- 1.2 Note the progress made to date to deliver the actions agreed in the Cost of Living Strategy; and
- 1.3 Endorse the proposals for provision of further help and support and agree next steps, as set out in Section 4.6 of this report.

2.0 Purpose of Report

- 2.1 The purpose of the report is to update Cabinet on progress made on the Council's response to the cost of living crisis.

3.0 Background

- 3.1 In response to the unprecedented cost of living crisis that is affecting people right across the UK, Cabinet approved a Cost of Living Strategy in October 2022, which set out the Council's plans to provide help and support to residents and businesses in the Borough. Since the strategy was approved, the financial outlook nationally has remained challenging.
- 3.2 As at the start of February 2023, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) predicted that the UK economy would contract in 2023, the only economy of any developed nation that is expected to do so.
- 3.3 Although inflation has begun to reduce slightly, it remains at an extremely high rate of over 10% (as of January 2023). Whilst the costs of petrol and diesel have reduced in recent months, the price of food had risen by 16.8% up to the end of December 2022. Of most concern is that it is the basic food staples, such as milk and eggs, which have risen by the largest amount.
- 3.4 Between October 2021 and October 2022, domestic gas prices increased by 129% and domestic electricity prices by 66%. Whilst the Government has introduced measures to cap energy bills for a period, the future scope of these remains uncertain, and further increases are expected in April 2023.
- 3.5 Nationally, although average pay overall has risen, it is still significantly behind the rate of inflation.
- 3.6 Interest rates also remain at their highest rate in 14 years, with the Bank of England benchmark rate being raised to 4% at the start of February 2023.
- 3.7 Regionally, the Federation of Small Business (FSB) has reported 39% of their members are still anticipating growing in the next year. However, Britain's manufacturers have cut their growth forecasts for industry, with almost 60% of manufacturers planning to raise prices further in the next 3 months, risking fuelling a further surge in inflation hitting supply chain and residents alike.

"Given the disparity in relief provided in the UK and competitor countries, it is essential that the Government now delivers on its Energy Security Strategy and addresses the outstanding disproportionate costs UK manufacturers face in electricity bills, including high renewable levies and network costs. Years of paying more for these elements of electricity costs have placed UK industry at a competitive disadvantage against its European and global competitors."

Charlotte Horobin, Region Director, Make UK

Cost of Living Strategy Update

- 3.8 Businesses have cautiously welcomed clarification on how the government will continue to support them with energy prices, but the level of support will be materially lower after March 2023. There is also concern that with the cost of energy projected to go down this may mean many businesses may now not qualify for the discount under the Energy Bill Relief Scheme. With the fragile state of many businesses, particularly small and medium enterprises, this is a major concern, and given the substantial reduction in support after March, the imperative for businesses to take action to control energy costs is greater than ever.
- 3.9 Businesses are responding and starting to think about building their longer-term energy resilience with the cost and availability of energy an on-going issue for some of Telford's largest manufacturers, such as Tier 1 automotive suppliers. However, whilst these businesses are keen to install energy saving features, such as solar panels and wind turbines, they continue to be hampered by the capacity of the grid. This is something that the Council is lobbying government on, and is a growing barrier to economic growth, alongside blocking the development of key energy infrastructure, including large scale EV charging.

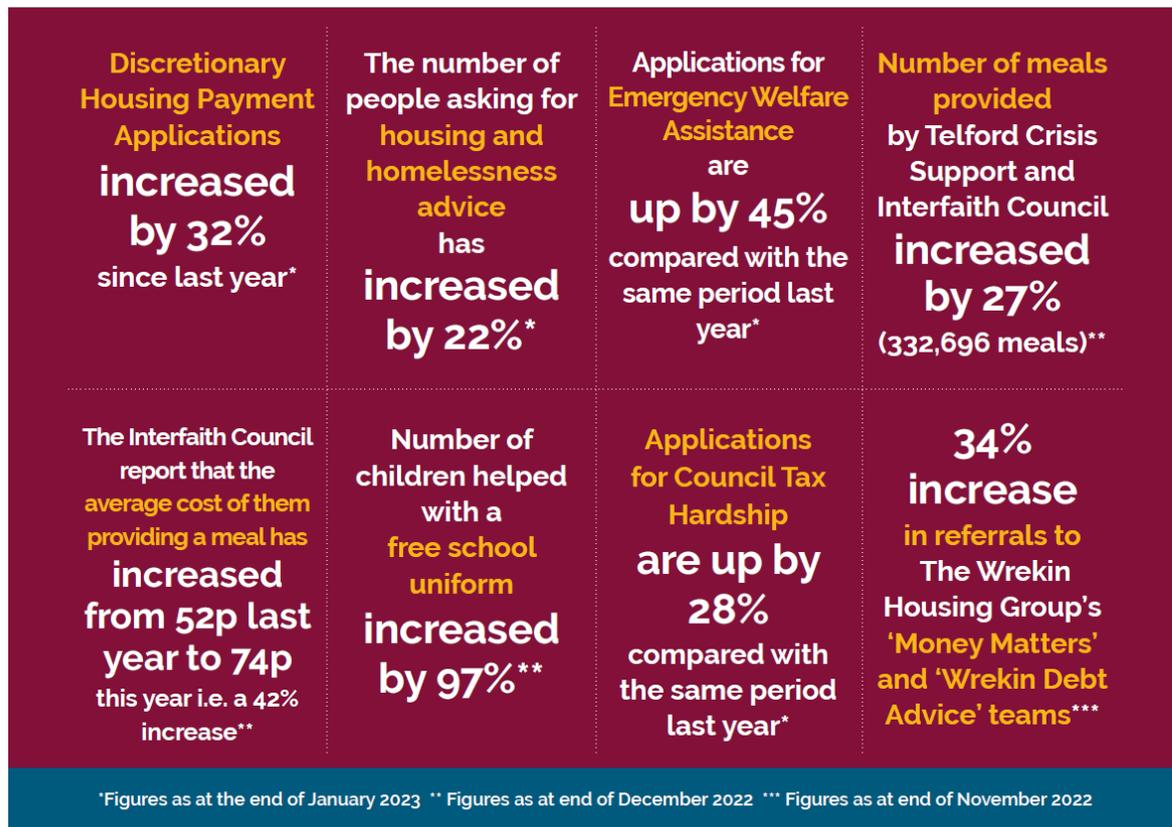
"High energy costs are an increased concern for manufacturers such as ourselves and we welcome every opportunity to work in partnership to help address the issues we all face."

Chris Lindsay, Denso

4.0 Summary of main proposals

4.1 Impact of the cost of living crisis in Telford & Wrekin

- 4.1.1 At the point that the Council's Cost of Living Strategy was approved, demand for support locally was already at an extremely high level, and this has only continued to grow over the winter period, as shown in the infographic below.



4.2 Delivery of cost of living support

4.2.1 The Cost of Living Strategy set out the Council's approach to helping residents and businesses with the cost of living crisis across seven key areas, including support with energy, food, Council Tax and benefits, housing, transport, and health and well-being.

4.2.2 Cabinet approved a package of additional help for residents and businesses most affected by the cost of living crisis; both direct support delivered by the Council, alongside delivery in partnership with other local organisations (see below for some highlights of the support provided). Further examples of how this work has made a difference for residents over the winter period are set out from Sections 4.3.1-4.3.7.



4.3 Support for residents

4.3.1 Help with energy costs

A key aim of the Cost of Living Strategy was to help residents with their energy costs. One direct way that we have done this is by purchasing low energy LED light bulbs through our climate change funding. Bulbs have been sourced from a local electrical supplier for residents most affected by the cost of living crisis. So far, 2,000 bulbs have been distributed through Shropshire Fire and Rescue, Telford Crisis Support and Wrekin Housing Group. An additional 2,000 are currently being distributed through Citizens Advice Telford and Wrekin, Town and Parish Councils, Warm Spaces and Marches Energy Agency. Based on Energy Saving Trust data, a low energy bulb saves on average £10 a year. The 4,000 bulbs purchased to date represent an annual saving of £40,000 for local residents and will also save in total 20,000 kgs of carbon emissions. The Council will continue to distribute further bulbs as they are needed.

“We are grateful for the low-energy lightbulbs provided by the Council. Like people across the country, our tenants are feeling the squeeze when it comes to the cost-of-living crisis and we’re doing all we can to support them during these challenging times. Being able to give these out for free will be a positive step in helping people make small changes to save money on their energy bills.”

Daniel Bebbington, Debt and Energy Manager - The Wrekin Housing Group

Cost of Living Strategy Update

We have also invested more funding into the Telford Energy Advice (TEA) helpline, which is delivered in partnership with the Marches Energy Agency. Since April 2021, TEA has helped more than 3,500 local households with advice, support, low cost energy saving measures, and access to energy efficiency grants and funding.

Alongside this, we have been continuing to work with households identified as being in fuel poverty to see if they are eligible for free energy efficiency measures, with funding secured to improve the energy efficiency measures of an additional 144 homes. In January 2023, we also launched a new Better Homes Loan, in partnership with Just Credit Union. Eligible homeowners can access loans from £300 to £8,000 to top up their loft insulation, install more energy efficient boilers or make other changes to improve their properties.

4.3.2 Help with food

The allocation of supermarket vouchers to families with children on income-related free school meals has continued, with the granting of vouchers in school holidays covering October half-term, Christmas, February half-term and Easter. Around 9,864 children received a voucher in the last round.

In January 2023, we also allocated a one-off £150 supermarket voucher to pension age residents in receipt of Pension Credit Guarantee Credit or Pension Savings Credit, and also in receipt of Housing Benefit or Council Tax Reduction. In total 3,549 households have received one of these vouchers.

“I was amazed when I opened the post to find a £150 voucher for food. Believe me when I say it will certainly be put to good use. I can buy some food and put in the freezer a nice big chicken that will last me days. Wonderful.”

Mrs W

Oh, my goodness I did not expect this at all. Thank you so much. The food vouchers....it is so, so, much appreciated and helpful. You made my kids and my day. I am speechless, and so thankful. Thank you so much.”

Miss G

Since the Cost of Living Strategy was approved, we have provided direct financial support to 13,233 households in the borough, an increase of more than 20%.

In addition to these direct awards, we have paid a further £144,000 to 709 residents who made an application for help through our discretionary scheme or applied for help through one of our other hardship schemes.

Cost of Living Strategy Update

In October 2022, Cabinet also agreed to provide an additional £90,000 of funding to help local foodbanks cope with rising demand for food parcels and increasing food costs, as highlighted in the infographic in Section 4.1. This funding was split between five local foodbanks. In addition, the Council has provided a small additional grant to Telford Crisis Support to help them run cooking on a budget sessions. Participants receive both free ingredients and equipment e.g., a slow cooker, so they can make healthy, low cost meals at home. The Council's Learn Telford team has also run similar cooking on a budget sessions at 4 locations across the Borough.

“In Nov 2022 the Telford and Wrekin Interfaith Council received an additional cost of living payment from Telford & Wrekin Council to assist us in our mission to look after the vulnerable in the Borough.

These funds came at a perfect time for us as a charity. We have seen a reduction in donations as more people are struggling. Due to the sharp increase of fuel, energy bills, and food bills, many members of the community found themselves in hardship.

As a charity we were also not immune to these increased costs, especially with regards to the costs of deliveries, purchasing food and goods to ensure our services continued to support those in greatest need.”

Les Pointer – Telford Interfaith Council

4.3.3 Council Tax freeze and discounts

The Council has again committed to a 0% increase in general Council Tax for 2023/24. We would expect to retain our position of having the lowest Council Tax for the services that this Council provides in the whole of the Midlands region.

In addition, the Council has decided to award a further discount of up to £100 per household to every recipient of Council Tax Reduction, which is a local scheme designed to help people on low incomes pay their Council Tax. Part of this discount (£25) is being funded through new Government funding which was announced in December 2022.

4.3.4 Warm and welcoming spaces

35 warm and welcoming spaces have received funding through our Cost of Living Community Grant, with grants of up to £5,000 enabling community groups and Town & Parish Councils to open their buildings, offering food, activities, and a chance for people to get together and socialise. The first ones opened at the end of November 2022. All thirty-five are now open and running across the Borough. Attendances have varied week to week but have been as high as 770 in a week.



4.3.5 Help to quit smoking

Our local service to support people to quit smoking is provided free to residents by the Council's Healthy Lifestyle Service. Since April 2022, a small team of 3 Advisors have supported 440 people to quit. As the average cost of smoking (£2,451 a year) is now equivalent to the average household's annual energy bills (£2,500), the support we have given residents to take action to quit is likely to have saved Telford & Wrekin residents more than £1m a year to help offset the rising cost of living, as well as improving their health and wellbeing. An additional three full time Advisors joined the team in January 2023, and work is underway to increase referrals to the service including targeted work with General Practice and a social media campaign.

4.3.6 Increasing benefit take-up by older residents

The Council and a range of other partners have also stepped up efforts to ensure that residents, particularly older people, are claiming everything they are entitled to, for example:

- The Council has provided grant funding to Age UK to enable them to expand their Older People's Benefits Advice Service in Telford & Wrekin. This has enabled them to maximise the benefit entitlement of older people in the Borough to an estimated value of over £1million. On average, each client supported with a benefits claim by Age UK has received £4,164 a year, and with most benefits awards being longer than a year, bringing significant revenue into the local community.

Case study from Age UK

Mrs D was beginning to struggle with caring for her husband, as well as with her own health. Mrs D was assessed to be eligible for Attendance Allowance and was offered assistance to claim by Age UK. Two months later, Mrs D was awarded Attendance Allowance at the high rate. This made a big difference to Mrs D as she could afford to pay for products and services to help her with her own needs and with her informal caring role. Age UK also used their expert knowledge to help Mr & Mrs D with their Pension Credit claim. This meant that Mr & Mrs D now receive £116.94 a week in Pension Credit, along with the extra £92.40 Attendance Allowance awarded to Mrs D. This also meant that they were entitled to Government cost of living payments amounting to £650 in 2022/23 and £900 in 2023/24. They are also entitled to help with health costs, assistance with a TV licence and qualify for cold weather payments of £25.00 a week when the temperature is below freezing.

The extra income and support offered by Age UK in claiming these benefits made Mr & Mrs D more resilient to the cost of living crisis, they were able to keep the property adequately heated, which was especially important to Mr D who had a history of falls and osteoarthritis, conditions that would be aggravated by the cold.

In total, Mr & Mrs D received an additional £10,885 in annual support and were incredibly grateful for the assistance provided.

Mrs D said:

“This outcome is absolutely amazing, I can’t thank your Benefits Officer enough for her knowledge and support, the information we received was excellent throughout.”

- Between April and December 2022, the Wellbeing and Independence Partnership, commissioned by Telford & Wrekin Council, also assisted 174 older people to claim welfare benefits totalling over £722,000.
- Between September and December 2022, the Council’s Financial Case Management Team assisted 1,810 older people, or those in receipt of care or support, with help and advice regarding benefit entitlement and care costs.
- In December 2022, the Council’s Benefit Service wrote to 253 older people where it appeared from our benefit records that they may have an unclaimed entitlement to Pension Credit Guarantee Credit. This letter encouraged customers to make an online application, or to contact Citizen’s Advice or, where appropriate, the Money Matters team at The Wrekin Housing Group for support with applying.

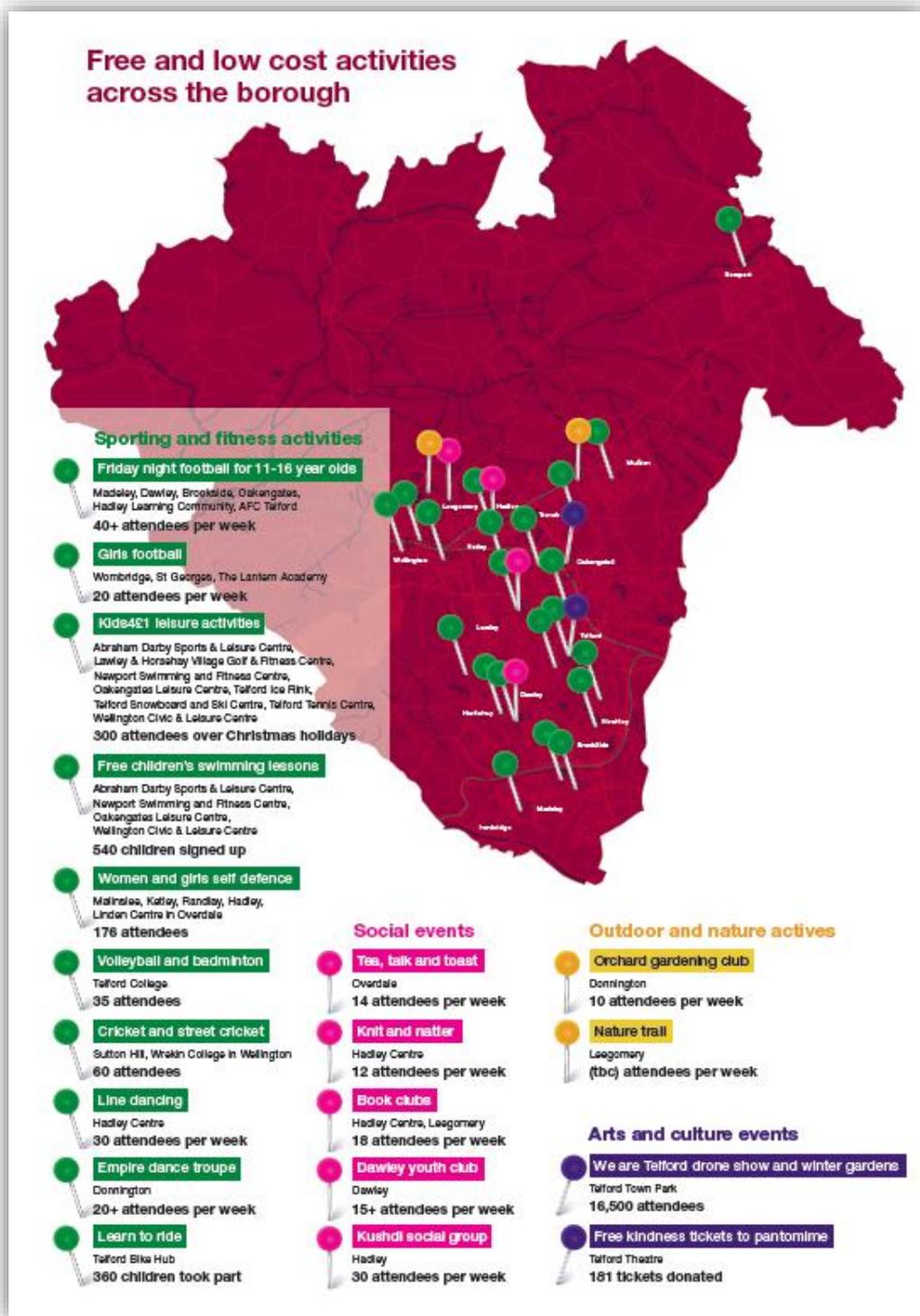
4.3.7 Work Express bus service

In December 2022, the new Council funded Work Express bus service launched, providing a link to key employment sites from areas of high unemployment and a new direct route for school pupils to the Telford Priory School in Oakengates. Fares are capped at a maximum of £2 per single journey for adults (£1 for U16s) and provide significantly quicker journey times for customers using the route. The

new service had 2,921 users during January 2023, with one rider stating that it had saved them over £100 per week in taxi fares.

4.3.8 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, a selection of which are highlighted on the map below:



4.4 Support for businesses

4.4.1 The following section highlights how we are implementing the actions in the Strategy and their impact for local businesses:

4.4.2 Marches Energy Grant

Jointly funded by the Marches LEP, the Marches Energy Grant (MEG) has received over 30 expressions of interest from Telford companies to date. Supporting businesses to address energy efficiency and supply, in an extension to previous EU grant programmes, the MEG grant is accessible for business to consumer businesses, including community enterprises and High Street businesses.

4.4.3 Cool Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin

Through our partnership with Cool Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin, businesses can access online resources and consultancy tailored to their company to help identify options for energy efficiency and sustainability best practice. Keeping things simple and practical is a common message from those who have benefitted to date:



LOAD LOCK

Loadlock Limited has supplied tertiary packaging solutions to the UK's major manufacturers and blue chip companies for over 15 years.

Registered with the Cool Shropshire and Telford Scheme in October 2022 - aims included:-

- Identifying improvements
- Improving communications with customers
- Becoming "carbon neutral"
- Calculating their carbon footprint

- They used the software to identify potential actions - "a very straight-forward process"
- The Cool Shropshire and Telford Team provided advice on the 'phone to work through the options and address any specific questions.
- Loadlock now understand carbon footprinting far more and are in the process of calculating it based on their Scope 1 & 2 emissions.

"I have just done the registration. It is so simple, I love it."
Emma includes the link to Cool Shropshire and Telford on her website with a paragraph about the scheme."

Emma Cantillion – [The Barn at Lees Farm](#)

4.4.4 Cost of Business events

Alongside the Council's established programme of business seminars and events delivered through the Telford Growth Hub, two bespoke 'Cost of Business' events have taken place:

- Targeting manufacturing companies across all sectors **Energy: Navigating the Market and Delivering Resilience** was facilitated by Make UK. More than 40 businesses signed up and many more have benefitted through the sharing of the event recording. Speakers covered the current state of the energy market, Lyreco shared best practice around their renewable energy initiatives at their national headquarters in Telford, and there was a look forward to the development of a strategic Sustainability & Energy Business Cluster to share and drive best practice.



- On 8th February Telford's **Business Support Showcase – Energy Efficiency & Resilience** took place at AFC Telford. Delivered in partnership with the Chamber of Commerce, this in-person event engaged over 60 attendees, bringing together local partners and organisations to offer advice and guidance on ways to move to net zero and invest to build resilience. Speakers covered grant support, new technology and strategic buying to manage the energy market, as well as networking and sharing of best practice.

“Really informative, really useful to attend an event where you can just listen to what other people are sharing, their thoughts and their ideas, so certainly coming away with a lot of ideas and thoughts to take back to the business.”

Michael Harte, Director at Bridge Cheese

“Really interesting, we’ve learnt a lot already, some good ideas for us to take away and look at further and engage with some of the companies that are here.”

Craig Perry, Financial Controller, Magna

“Genuinely one of the best events I’ve ever been to, very focussed on the niche area that we’re looking at, and I think there are opportunities not only to improve our environmental credentials and renewables, but also to actually generate more revenue for the business, so I’m excited about that.”

Wayne Carter, Managing Director, Fabweld Steel Products

4.4.5 Eco Grant and Diversification Grant

Through Pride in Our High Street, we have launched both an Eco Grant and a new Diversification Grant. To date we have awarded 29 Eco Grants with a further 10 in the pipeline, across all six of our Borough Towns. Recipients include:

Pamper Me Pretty in Oakengates have been using portable electric fan heaters as a heat source in the Salon which reduces the sales floor available to use and they are not energy efficient. They have received an Eco grant of £1,300 to purchase and fit three energy efficient, wall mounted heaters, bringing down their heating bills significantly.



Nettie of the Gorge

- Nettie of the Gorge florists in Ironbridge had problems with humidity in the shop leading to stock damage.
- There was no heating supply and the shop also has a poorly rated fridge.
- Courses are run from the shop and the constant use of a kettle for hot drinks means higher energy costs.

Nettie's has received grant of £584 to buy thermostatic radiators, a top rated fridge and coffee machine all of which will help her reduce her energy bills.

The Diversification Grant launched in February 2023 is a new, flexible grant pot, recognising the need for high street businesses to look at alternative ways to generate income, whether that be through delivering new services, marketing or introducing new product lines.

The first Diversification Grant has been awarded to:

Cost of Living Strategy Update

This **great family butchers** is a significant asset for Madeley High Street, but due to the crisis they recently had to let two members of staff go as sales decreased.

Following a trial of hot take-out food before Christmas they **have successfully applied for a £4,000 diversification grant** which has allowed them to purchase the equipment needed to set up a take-away deli section which is driving increased sales and new customers.

A circular photograph showing two people, a woman and a man, standing back-to-back in front of the entrance to Boulton's Artisan Butchery. The shop's name and 'ARTISAN BUTCHERY' are visible above the door.

4.4.6 Climate Change Fund

The Council's Climate Change Fund has continued to support businesses. Fabweld Steel Limited recently received a grant of £8,120 to install two electric vehicle charging points. These will be open for public use and powered by their existing photovoltaic system, providing electric vehicles with 100% renewable energy.

The logo for Exotic Zoo, featuring the word 'EXOTIC' in green and 'ZOO' in black with a stylized animal head in the 'O'.

The Exotic Zoo are using a grant for the first phase of their larger solar project:

"We need to use electricity 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, to replicate a range of specialised climates around the world so that we can ensure the health and wellbeing of our animals.

Reducing our energy consumption is simply not an option, so we wanted to find a more sustainable solution, both financially and ecologically. The council's grant is helping us begin on our path to switch to solar power and, ultimately, 100% self-generated energy.

We've estimated that the first phase of our plans will allow us to reduce our footprint by a massive eight tonnes of carbon dioxide per annum.

It will also really help us with fuel bills, which have rocketed from £1000 a month to £5000, meaning we can keep our prices affordable, so that everyone can continue visiting us to meet the animals and learn about conservation."

Scott Adams, Director of the Exotic Zoo

A photograph of a group of staff members in green uniforms standing behind a banner that says 'EXOTIC ZOO'. In the foreground, there are images of various animals including a lemur, a fox, and a frog.

4.4.7 Hello Telford

Hello Telford, our business collaboration platform continues to grow with some 132 business regularly using the site to connect, collaborate, share best practice and develop trade links.

4.4.8 Business Rates

To support businesses managing their finances we have distributed £94,000 to 44 businesses identified as eligible for Small Business Rate Relief. A publicity campaign has now been launched to promote that businesses can pay their

Cost of Living Strategy Update

business rate instalments over 12 months rather than 10, which lowers monthly payments. For those who prefer to pay over 10 months we are offering payment free months in April and May rather than the traditional months of February and March.

4.5 Raising awareness of cost of living support

4.5.1 Information for residents

4.5.2 The Council launched its new cost of living information webpages (www.telford.gov.uk/costofliving) in October 2022. The webpages pull together into one place all the current help, support, advice, and information provided by the Council and its partners. Since the page went live, it has been viewed 13,437 times.

4.5.3 Another way that we have been raising awareness of the cost of living support available locally is via an ongoing social media campaign. To date, there have been 77 cost of living related posts since October 2022, with engagement exceeding our usual targets for both Facebook and Twitter. Overall, cost of living content has reached more than 344,000 people.

4.5.4 In October 2022, the Council published a “Totally Telford” magazine cost of living special, which was delivered to every home in the Borough. This contained articles covering a range of topics such as cooking on a budget, reducing energy use, affordable family days out, and resources to support business and new start-ups.

4.5.5 We also produced 4,000 postcard style flyers with a QR code that links through to our cost of living webpages. These flyers have been distributed via libraries, Shropshire Fire & Rescue outreach workers, and doctors’ surgeries.

4.5.6 Across November and December 2022, the Council ran a series of cost of living awareness training courses for external partners and stakeholders, including Town and Parish Councils, the community and voluntary sector and front-line staff from across the Council. The sessions covered the impact of the crisis locally, the main benefits and financial support available both nationally and locally, the support available to help with health and wellbeing, and the services offered through the voluntary and community sector. Separately, sessions were run for Council staff where, in addition to the above, we covered the support available to them specifically as employees.

4.5.7 Following the live sessions, a recorded version has been launched on YouTube, with the link being shared with a wide range of partners, including health partners. Over 660 people have attended a live or recorded session, enabling them to signpost residents to help with the cost of living.

4.5.8 A further event, specifically for Borough Council Members is planned for early March 2023.

4.5.9 Information for Businesses

4.5.10 Alongside the new cost of living web-pages for residents, we have also launched a Cost of Doing Business micro-site ([Business Support | Enterprise Telford \(enterprise-telford.co.uk\)](https://enterprise-telford.co.uk)) that provides a one stop shop of information, advice and signposting across all aspects of business support. Promoted via business networks including the Federation of Small Business, Chamber of Commerce, and the Business Board, in the first month over 400 visits were made to the site.

4.6 Next Steps

- 4.6.1 The Government have announced that a fourth round of Household Support Funding will be made available from 1st April 2023, this time covering a 12-month period. However, the exact amount of our allocation and the funding criteria have not yet been confirmed. Subject to the final details, we would propose to allocate the fund in a similar way to the previous rounds, including the continuation of school holiday supermarket vouchers for free school meal eligible children, and a one-off supermarket voucher to some of our lowest income pensioner households.
- 4.6.2 Over the last year, we have seen demand for our Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) scheme increase by 32%, despite the Government cutting our funding by 30%. This increased demand has been driven by a combination of the cost of living crisis and significant increases in private rents. This fund has always been an essential tool that we have used to mitigate the risks of rent arrears and evictions in the Borough, and without which many residents would become homeless. It is therefore proposed that additional Council funding is set aside to ensure that the DHP scheme can be sustained for the remainder of this year and next, through to March 2024. The exact amount will be known once our 2023/24 DHP grant is announced.
- 4.6.3 Section 4.3.8 of this report summarised the success that Age UK have achieved with maximising benefits for local older people. To enable for this work to continue for another year, it is proposed that we provide a further one-off grant of £30,000.
- 4.6.4 In addition, given the increase in demand and costs that foodbanks have been experiencing, we are proposing to increase the funding for foodbanks by a total of £25,000 for the next 12 months.
- 4.6.5 In late 2022, the Government announced that it would be creating a new scheme to provide help to residents who were not connected to the mains gas grid and used alternative fuels as their main form of heating. This group, who have not been eligible for any of the previous Government support or discounts with their energy costs, will be able to apply for a £200 Alternative Fuels Payment. These payments will be administered by local councils on behalf of the Government, although the online application and the eligibility check will be carried out centrally. It was originally expected that this scheme would commence in December 2022, however we have recently been informed that there have been challenges with the pilot testing that mean its launch has been delayed until at least February 2023.

Cost of Living Strategy Update

- 4.6.6 It is recognised that one of the impacts of the cost of living crisis may be a deterioration in dental health as more families will struggle to afford toiletries including those essential for dental hygiene. This is coupled with increasing challenges accessing NHS dental care. In December 2022, we submitted a bid to NHS England to receive free toothbrushes and toothpaste to distribute to communities in need across the Borough. Our bid has not yet been determined. If successful, 26 distribution sites would be set up across the Borough.
- 4.6.7 The Council is also exploring other ways to provide support for residents with their energy costs. Through our affordable warmth programmes, our focus to date has been on residents most impacted by the current crisis. However, we are aware that the impact is being felt across the community, and so we are exploring how we could widen the help to residents not eligible for existing support. In particular, we are aware that some homeowners would like to generate their own renewable energy, both to help with energy bills and to reduce their carbon footprint. Potential barriers for residents include the upfront cost, awareness of options available, and access to qualified installers. We are currently assessing a range of options that could help to address these, including working with providers of low-cost long-term loans, and collective purchasing schemes, where multiple residents benefit from savings through bulk buying, and would also have access to objective advice, pre-vetted accredited installers of equipment such as solar panels and batteries.
- 4.6.8 The Council is also closely monitoring national initiatives such as ECO+. The government are proposing non means tested grants to fund a wide variety of installation measures. This is currently proposed to be available for those in council tax bands A-D and whose home are rated EPC (Energy Performance Certificate) D or higher. The scheme has not been finalised and the Council will look to avoid duplication by looking at how we can add additional value to the ECO+ scheme and maximise the benefit of it to Telford residents.
- 4.6.7 We will also continue to support our businesses, focussing particularly on how we build resilience and growth opportunities.
- 4.6.8 We will invest the majority of our £5.8m UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) allocation into business growth including, from April, new programmes to support businesses to grow their export markets, investing in start-up programmes as well as a continued focus on investment into energy efficiency and new generation capacity. Grant funding will be available across all sectors including manufacturing, retail, care, and community businesses. The programme will include £1.5m investment into the Station Quarter Skills & Enterprise Hub, delivering new incubation units with wrap around business support, alongside the delivery of new Further and Higher Education training targeted at increasing digital skills, supporting residents into local employment.
- 4.6.9 We will expand the successful Cool Shropshire & Telford & Wrekin programme, providing 121 specialist support to ensure businesses are able to deliver on the energy efficiency opportunities identified by the programme review. This will include linking them into the Marches Energy Grant.

Cost of Living Strategy Update

4.6.10 In partnership with the Borough Climate Change Partnership, we will launch a new business led Sustainability & Energy Cluster to develop solutions around connectivity, energy costs and skills needs, working together to lobby for improved grid capacity, identifying gaps in demand and supply capacity and promoting good practice.

4.6.11 Over the next 6 months we will develop a new Invest Telford Economic Strategy working with businesses and business organisations to ensure – including through lobbying Government – that we have the right support, skills, investment programmes and infrastructure in place to support all sectors of our business community.

5.0 Alternative Options

5.1 As the Report identifies, residents and businesses are being impacted by rising prices and economic uncertainty. Without the measures set out both residents and local businesses would find themselves more vulnerable to these impacts.

6.0 Key Risks

6.1 The key risks associated with the cost of living crisis are set out in the strategy, and include widening existing inequalities, increasing poverty, causing more people to get into debt, causing or exacerbating health conditions linked to cold homes, and adversely impacting on people's mental health and wellbeing. For local organisations and businesses, risks include insolvency, reduced profitability, and restricted ability to grow and invest, with a direct knock-on effect onto residents and consumers, as businesses are forced to put up prices and reduce the range of goods and services they produce.

7.0 Council Priorities

7.1 The Cost of Living Strategy supports all Council priorities, but in particular a community-focused, innovative Council providing efficient, effective and quality services and the priority that every child, young person, and adult lives well in their community.

8.0 Financial Implications

8.1 The actions and measures outlined in the strategy to respond to the cost of living crisis have been funded from a combination of existing budgets, one off funding and grants. The proposals for provision of further help and support as set out in Section 4.6 of the report will continue to be funded in this way, as well as new grant allocations such as the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.

9.0 Legal and HR Implications

9.1 The creation of a Cost of living Strategy will assist the Council to meet its statutory obligations to residents in need of support. The report and strategy document set out the many different ways in which the Council will act for

Cost of Living Strategy Update

our residents. All the measures set out in the strategy are in furtherance of the Council's statutory duties, and the Council has the power to undertake such activities. Any measures which allow the Council to meet current and future needs in a more cost-effective way demonstrate the Council is meeting its duty to act prudently and in a financially responsible manner. Legal advice has been and will be provided on an ongoing basis.

10.0 Ward Implications

10.1 Borough wide impact.

11.0 Health, Social and Economic Implications

11.1 The cost of living crisis will have a significant impact on the health of Telford and Wrekin's residents as well as on their social and economic wellbeing. The Cost of Living Strategy sets out a wide range of existing and proposed support measures that are designed to benefit residents and businesses' health, social and economic wellbeing.

12.0 Equality and Diversity Implications

12.1 The Cost of Living Strategy takes account of the legal requirement to pay due regard to the aims of the Public Sector Equality Duty. Key to this is consideration of people's specific needs based on their protected characteristics. People who share protected characteristics of age and disability are expected to be disproportionately affected by the cost of living crisis and its consequences. The success of the strategy activity relies on active participation by the whole community. Steps are taken to make sure that cost of living support is inclusive and the differing needs of individuals are considered so that support can be effectively targeted.

13.0 Climate Change and Environmental Implications

13.1 The rising costs of energy highlight the need to accelerate the installation of energy efficiency and renewable energy measures in both homes and businesses in the Borough. The Cost of Living Strategy sets out a range of existing and planned measures to support householders and businesses to reduce their carbon footprint, whilst also benefiting from saving money on energy costs.

14.0 Background Papers

- 1 Cost of Living Strategy report – Cabinet 13th October 2022
- 2 Affordable Warmth Strategy update – Cabinet 5th January 2023

15.0 Appendices

None.

Cost of Living Strategy Update

16.0 Report Sign Off

Signed off by	Date sent	Date signed off	Initials
Legal	08/02/2023	09/02/2023	RP
Finance	09/02/2023	09/02/2023	PT