

Item 4

**Report of the Executive Director Core Services,
the Executive Director Growth & Sustainability
and the Executive Director Public Health & Communities,
to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OSC)
on 11th October 2022**

Cost-of-Living Crisis (COLC)

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of the cost-of-living support available to Barnsley residents and planned interventions over the coming months leading up to winter. Officers are currently preparing a Cost of Living Crisis (COLC) Strategic Response and Action Plan, in collaboration with the Tactical Response Group established in September 2022. This Strategy and Action Plan (currently in early draft) will set out the Council's strategic approach to the crisis over a set period (it will be a crisis response rather than a long-term strategy).
- 1.2 It needs to be very clear that the Council cannot solve the cost-of-living crisis, but it will work collaboratively with Barnsley 2030 partners and alongside existing partnerships such as Good Food Barnsley, Stronger Communities and Early Help to do what it can. A separate report (to the Council's Cabinet) will seek to approve how additional Household Support Grant monies (an additional allocation of £2.3m) will be spent up to March 2023.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 Whilst the cost-of-living crisis is having a significant impact across the country, it is disproportionately affecting boroughs like Barnsley where poverty was already increasing before the Covid pandemic, exacerbating inequalities, and disproportionately affecting the poorest communities. Price rises driven by energy price inflation, alongside additional taxation, are having an impact on most households in the borough with the energy price hike in autumn set to amplify these challenges further.
- 2.2 Real incomes are reducing and costs increasing, with inflation at 9.1% (at the time of writing) – this is affecting energy, food, and rent. Over a third of residents in the borough are expected to be in 'fuel poverty' come the autumn, with families and vulnerable households having to make decisions regarding which essentials they prioritise (heat or eat).
- 2.3 Tackling poverty and addressing these inequalities is not new for a borough like Barnsley. However, the scale of the crisis is unprecedented.

The Stats:

- Over a third of residents in the borough are in 'fuel poverty'. This equates to around 41,000 households
- Almost a quarter of children in the borough live in low-income families
- Almost 20% of children are on free school meals (FSM)
- 27% of residents in the borough are economically inactive
- Over 26,000 residents are on Universal Credit

3.0 National Government Support

- 3.1 Central Government has committed to a £37bn assistance package to support households with the cost-of-living crisis and rising energy prices. It is targeted at those in most need, with vulnerable households receiving at least £1,200 this year.
- 3.2 The below summarises the support that has been made available since April 2022:

Low Income Households

- Cost of living payment totalling £650 paid in 2 instalments
- £140 Warm Home Discount (Application based - Oct to Mar)
- Extension to Household Support Grant (£4.6M for Barnsley)
- Healthy Activities Funds (£1M for Barnsley)
- Discretionary Council Tax rebate scheme (£562K for Barnsley)

All Households

- £150 Council Tax rebate for those in bands A to D (90% of households in Barnsley)
- £400 discount to be applied directly to energy bills
- £300 Pensioner cost of living payment (Pensioners only – top up to Winter Fuel Payment)
- £150 Disability cost of living payment (those on disability benefit only)

The above is in addition to existing funding support that is available to households, full details are set out here: Overall Government Support for the cost of living:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/government-support-for-the-cost-of-living-factsheet/government-support-for-the-cost-of-living-factsheet>.

4.0 Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council (BMBC) use of Government Grants

Household Support Grant – April-September 2022

- 4.1 The Council received £2.3M Household Support Grant (HSG) covering the period (Apr to Sept 22), this being the 4th iteration of this scheme. The purpose of this grant is to support low-income households with the cost of food and energy and other essential household expenses.
- 4.2 £2M has been allocated to families in receipt of free school meals or pension credits via a £150 Post Office Voucher, supporting 11,208 households across the borough.
- 4.3 The Council has used a further £318K of the grant to fund community groups to support low-income households via a range of projects and initiatives. Note all the initiatives are targeted at households and they will be promoted on the Council's More Money in Your Pocket (MMIYP) Website which gives more information regarding the support available to the residents of Barnsley across the key areas of:
- Housing Support
 - Support with utility bills
 - Food support
 - Budgeting support
 - Wellbeing support
 - Employment and skills support
 - Household support grants and other support
 - Freebies and money saving ideas

The website also has a dedicated area for Berneslai Homes tenants.

- 4.4 Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee are encouraged to access the More Money in Your Pocket website for further information relating to specific areas of support - <https://www.barnsley.gov.uk/services/advice-benefits-and-council-tax/help-with-the-rising-cost-of-living/>

4.5 **Community group support includes:**

HSG April to September	Approved	
Barnsley Carers Service (Making Spaces)	£8,250.00	Carers Support: Food, energy, and household support (a range of one-off payments) for carers and to low-income carer employees.
Crossroads (Barnsley) Limited	£7,200.00	
Community First Credit Union	£30,000.00	Interest free loans for Credit Union members resident in the Barnsley area. The loans will be for Food, energy costs or purchasing essential items.
The Uniform Fairy, Salvation Army	£2,000.00	To include items such as underwear, sanitary products and water bottles with pre-owned school uniforms that are recycled at a low cost.
Barnsley College	£860.00	Information on cooking on a low budget.
The Salvation Army	£13,450.00	Supporting residents with help towards food, fuel, clothing, white goods, household goods.
Good Food Barnsley	£77,000.00	To franchise Storehouse & Field with the aim of rolling it out into different locations across the borough.
Fuelbank	£49,250.00	The first of its kind in Barnsley. Referrals from across Barnsley will be triaged for energy efficiency, energy and utility grants, income maximisation, with some health and wellbeing support. People will benefit from crisis pre-payment meter top ups with advice and guidance to avoid dependency.
Astrea Academy	£7,000.00	Providing school uniforms and other essential items for pupils. Also purchase additional uniform creating a uniform stock for use throughout the school year.
Dearne Area Team	£1,530.00	Breakfast clubs
Barnsley Council Rose Vouchers	£30,000.00	Funding to continue to offer households vouchers for fruit and vegetables, administered by the family centres.
Barnsley College	£45,000.00	Food, energy and wider essentials.
Coolkidz	£1,793.00	Supplementary funding to Healthy Holiday Clubs to enable access to children who are not on free school meals.
Learning Hotspots	£4,680.00	
Childsplay	£7,407.50	
Momentous	£21,000.00	
Playworks Shafton	£1,344.00	
Barnsley Gymnastics	£2,404.80	
MMIYP	£7,830.70	Marketing to help people with the cost of living by providing information in one place.
Total Committed Spend	£318,000.00	

4.6 The total number of households supported are shown below:

Single applicants	Couples without children	Couples with children	Working pensioners	Families on FSM	Those on Pension Credit	Other Households in need	Total Supported
515	764	1,111	313	89	438	5,327	8,557

5.0 Other Funding Support

Holiday Activity and Food Programme Fund

- 5.1 The Council received £1M Holiday Activity and Food Programme (HAF) grant allocation to deliver the healthy holidays clubs during non-term time periods. The purpose of this grant is to support all children in receipt of Free School Meals with a free place in holiday activity clubs where a free nutritious meal is provided. The programme runs during Easter, Summer and the Christmas school holidays.
- 5.2 During the Easter programme, 59% of places available utilised, supporting 1,013 children, of which 853 were free school meals children.
- 5.3 The Summer programme is still running, to date 26% of spaces have been utilised, reaching 1,581 children, of which 778 are from vulnerable families entitled to free school meals.

Discretionary Council Tax Rebate

- 5.4 Aside from the national £150 council tax rebate scheme to support households in bands A to D with rising energy costs, the scheme also allowed for a £562K discretionary element, allowing local authorities to apply their own discretion when awarding funding.
- 5.5 The Council has implemented a discretionary scheme to extend the £150 rebate to support households in bands E to H in receipt of local council tax support (LCTS). In addition, a further £25 will be awarded to all households in bands A to H in receipt of LCTS, resulting in all LCTS claimants receiving in total £175 council tax rebate (23,175 households).

6.0 BMBC Local Support

- 6.1 The following outlines planned interventions that will be in place to support residents of the borough over the winter period, targeted at those in most need:
- 6.2 **More Money in Your Pocket (MMIYP):** The Council has developed a new dedicated webpage to sign post people to support available to help with the cost-of-living crisis / financial hardship. The website is being widely promoted, with, for example signage being placed on service vehicles, cards being distributed to all Berneslai Homes tenants and spreading the news via Council media channels. See webpage for more details: <https://www.barnsley.gov.uk/services/advice-benefits-and-council-tax/help-with-the-rising-cost-of-living/>
- 6.3 **Food Support:** Through the Good Food Barnsley partnership there are two community shops with plans for a third in Hoyland and potentially a fourth in Kendray. The first community pantry, called Storehouse and Field, has been established and the Council will be looking to use the funding allocated from the HSG to roll this out across the borough. There are also other food support services such as the central foodbank and the Full Crumb kitchen.
- 6.4 **Local Welfare Assistance:** This provides support to homeless households with white goods and furniture. The funding is non-recurring with £101K remaining which is estimated to run out by December 2022.
- 6.5 **Welfare Advice:** Citizens Advice Barnsley (CAB) and DIAL provide a core service funded by the Council's Healthier Communities Service, with the Area Councils providing grants to pay for local services. The welfare advice services provide free, confidential, impartial, and independent legal advice to enable residents to deal with a whole range of issues such as debt and money advice, housing, relationship, employment, and consumer issues.
- 6.6 **Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs):** The Council receives funding from the Government Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to support people who are either in receipt of housing benefit or getting housing costs within their universal credit with funding top ups to ensure they can continue to pay their rent or rent arrears. There is £389K funding available for 22/23, 79% of this year's budget has already been spent.

- 6.7 **Discretionary Council Tax Relief Fund:** The Council provides Council Tax discretionary relief to individuals who may be suffering hardship but are not entitled to any other benefit related support due to their individual circumstances.
- 6.8 **Winter Warmth:** The Warm Homes Service provides property related support to those in energy inefficient homes or fuel poverty. The Affordable Warmth Grant (AWG) currently provides first time and boiler replacements to private residents in fuel poverty. This funding is essential in assisting those with underlying health conditions or at risk of illness due to excess cold in their properties, a key cause of excess winter deaths. A sum of £500K is available for 2022/23.
- 6.9 **Berneslai Homes:** The Tenants First Tenancy Support Officers (TSO) at Berneslai Homes have the skills and knowledge to support customers with their finances, budgeting, and benefit maximisation. Berneslai Homes have implemented champion roles for all TSO officers, so they can keep abreast of all changes from legislation to charity grants around 6 key areas – cost of living, food, Discretionary Housing Payments, water, housing benefit and energy.

Berneslai Homes are also running various “drop-in sessions” in community centres across the borough where tenants can access face to face support. They are launching a pilot “hardship fund” for eligible tenants to help with financial hardship, such as difficulty in paying for everyday essentials, with no alternative means of support. A cost-of-living toolkit is used by all Berneslai Homes Officers, and they have updated their webpages and vans to include links to the More Money in Your Pocket website.

- 6.10 **Affordable Warmth Charter:** Alongside these measures aimed at assisting the local residents with the cost-of-living crisis, the Council is seeking approval to adopt and launch an Affordable Warmth Charter. The development of the Affordable Warmth Charter aims to bring together knowledge, expertise and resources focusing on preventing health inequalities arising from fuel inefficient properties. In addition, it will enable residents to seek help in relation to fuel poverty and energy efficiency.
- 6.11 **Area Council and Ward Alliances Response to the COLC:** The six Area Councils are continuing to fund their welfare advice services in each of their local areas. The services are provided by Citizens Advice Barnsley, Dial and Age UK. The ‘offer’ is different in each of the areas depending on the priorities and needs of that area.

They are promoting More Money in Your Pocket in local communities, along with all the other support which is on offer, through social media and at all their events; connecting local partners into the messages and sharing the information with them; and supporting people to access the support and advice on the MMIYP website.

The COLC is discussed at Area Council and Ward Alliance meetings to share innovative ideas to support local communities. Each area is pulling their local partners together to provide a unified and informed response. Some areas are providing Resident Support Fairs where there will be practical solutions to living on a budget, ‘cook and eat’ sessions, and access to different partners to understand what support is on offer. The six areas are sharing good practice and learning from each other.

They are encouraging and supporting applications to the Ward Alliances from community groups wanting to provide support in their local communities to this crisis. All of the Ward Alliances will be supporting their communities in some way to assist with what is most needed locally.

Partnership working is taking place with the voluntary and community sector to understand what their offer is in local communities and how they can be supported to deliver it. Discussions will take place at the Voluntary and Community Sector Strategy Group to ensure all partners are aware of the support that is on offer and where this can be found.

‘Warm hubs’ will be promoted in local communities and this information will be shared with providers so they can also direct people to the right places for support. Area Councils will also be delivering winter warmer packs, and winter warmer events, with support from commissioned services. The

commissioned providers will be supporting this agenda through the services they offer through the Area Councils.

Area Councils will be the face of the Council in local communities and will support and direct people into the right support along with shaping and forming responses based on the changing needs of those communities.

7.0 Next Steps

7.1 In response to the COLC, the Barnsley 2030 Board held a workshop with all partners, on Monday 12th September, to coordinate and maximise the Council's impact to tackling the rising cost of living for everyone in the borough. At the meeting, there was a consensus that the more Money in Your Pocket Website will be the one-stop self-serve site for partners to promote advice and assistance and for residents to be signposted to, in the first instance, but also an appreciation that it would not be the solution for all. It was also agreed that the Council would establish a Tactical Co-ordination Group (TCG) and develop a wider Cost-of Living Crisis Strategic Response and Action Plan. The first TCG meeting took place on 21st September 2022.

7.2 A Further grant allocation of £2.3M is due to be received to cover the period October 22 to March 23. The specific conditions of the grant have yet to be released by central government, however it is anticipated that they will be along similar lines to previous iterations with a focus on supporting those entitled to Housing Benefits who do not meet the criteria to be eligible for the £650 cost of living payment, with some discretion around supporting other local schemes. Details are expected to be released in the coming weeks. An imminent report is to be circulated to the Council's Cabinet which makes recommendations for how the HSG monies can best support local communities during October to March. These interventions could include:

- Food support: Through the Council's Good Food Barnsley partnership there are opportunities to support the roll out of additional Storehouse and Field facilities.
- The extension to Healthy Holidays Programmes.
- The roll-out of borough-wide uniform recycling programmes.
- Local Welfare Assistance: To maintain the current scheme assuming awards remain at current levels would require around £240K per year or £64K to the end of the current financial year.
- Welfare Advice: CAB and DIAL provide a core service funded by the Council's Healthier Communities service, with the Area Councils providing grants to pay for local services.
- Additional funding to support Discretionary Housing Payments and the Tax Relief Fund.
- Winter Warmth: Officers have developed a proposal to expand the AWG to cover both insulation and boiler installations (including the use of renewable heating technology, where appropriate) alongside debt advice and support, where it is needed. To date in 2022/23, 38 boilers have been installed at a cost of £125,000. Last year, the fund ran out in February. Subject to Cabinet approval, the Council intends to invest £3m to extend the programme over the next 3 years (2022-25).
- Options to create Warm Havens with Barnsley Libraries and our Cultural Spaces.

8.0 Invited Witnesses

8.1 The following witnesses have been invited to answer questions from the Committee:-

- Matt O'Neill, Executive Director Growth & Sustainability, BMBC
- Kathy McArdle, Service Director Regeneration & Culture, BMBC
- Sarah Cartwright, Head of Strategic Housing, Sustainability & Climate Change, BMBC
- Julia Burrows, Executive Director Public Health & Communities, BMBC

- Phil Hollingsworth, Service Director Stronger, Safer, Healthier Communities, BMBC
- Jayne Hellowell, Head of Commissioning, Healthier Communities, BMBC
- Councillor Robert Frost, Cabinet Spokesperson Growth & Sustainability, BMBC
- Councillor Caroline Makinson, Cabinet Spokesperson Public Health & Communities

9.0 Possible Areas for Investigation

9.1 Members may wish to ask questions around the following areas:

- What do you foresee being the biggest challenge of the cost of living crisis?
- What are the wider implications of not tackling the cost of living crisis at a local level and how will this impact upon residents and services? How are services preparing to respond to the potential impact?
- To what extent are services working together as 'One Council' to manage the challenges of the cost of living crisis? What could work better and where does responsibility lie for decision making?
- How is the organisation supporting employees who may be affected?
- What work is being done with partners, to maximise the support local organisations can provide to residents?
- What assessments have been done to target the right support to the right people?
- What evaluation has been done to determine the success of the Holiday Activity & Food Programme, what have you learned and why was take-up low?
- What evaluation has been done to ensure that government funding has been used so that it is most effective and provides value for money?
- Is work progressing at an appropriate pace to deliver support at the right time?
- What more can be done to support those affected? What are the barriers to providing this support?
- When do you expect the interventions, strategy and action plan to be fully embedded into service delivery?
- What feedback have you received regarding the 'More Money in Your Pocket Website'? Has there been an increase in uptake over the last month?
- Given the cohort you are working with, how is the information being communicated to those who are digitally excluded or may need help navigating the support available?
- What sources have you accessed in order to utilise best practice in relation to this work?
- How will the Council ensure an appropriate balance between supporting the needs of communities whilst addressing its own financial pressures as a result of rising costs?
- What are the long-term plans to support residents to move out of poverty and reduce the number of people affected in the future?
- What can Members do to support this work?

10.0 Background Papers and Useful Links

- BMBC More Money in Your Pocket Website:
<https://www.barnsley.gov.uk/services/advice-benefits-and-council-tax/help-with-the-rising-cost-of-living/>
- Rising cost of living in the UK, House of Commons Library:
<https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-9428/>
- Cost of Living Hub, Local Government Association:
<https://www.local.gov.uk/our-support/safer-and-more-sustainable-communities/cost-living-hub>
- Overall Government Support for the Cost of Living - Factsheet:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/government-support-for-the-cost-of-living-factsheet/government-support-for-the-cost-of-living-factsheet>
- Barnsley 2030 Website:
<https://www.barnsley.gov.uk/services/our-council/barnsley-2030/>

11.0 Glossary

AWG	Affordable Warmth Grant
BMBC	Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council
CAB	Citizens Advice Barnsley
COLC	Cost of Living Crisis
DHP	Discretionary Housing Payment
FSM	Free School Meals
HAF	Holiday Activity and Food Programme Fund
HSG	Household Support Grant
LCTS	Local Council Tax Support
MMIYP	More Money in Your Pocket Website
OSC	Overview and Scrutiny Committee
TCG	Tactical Co-ordination Group
TSO	Tenancy Support Officers

12.0 Officer Contact

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03 October 2022