

**Meeting:**           **Housing sub-committee**

**Date:**               **4 July 2022**

**Title:**               **Cost of Living**

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**Author:**           Jackie Laughton, Assistant  
Chief Executive

**Service:**          Corporate Strategy and  
Customer Service

**Wards  
affected:**         All

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## **1. Purpose of Report**

In response to a request from the sub-committee, this report provides an overview of the support available or planned for residents and tenants to help address the current cost of living increase.

## **2. Recommendation**

The sub-committee is recommended to note the contents of the report and identify any further work for inclusion in the 2022/23 work programme.

## **3. Details**

### **Policy Context**

- 3.1 In North Tyneside, around 1 in 10 residents live in an area that is ranked as the most deprived in England. The southern areas of the borough have the highest levels of deprivation, however there are pockets of deprivation in many wards. There are currently around 7300 children or young people who are entitled to free school meals and this has been on the increase during the pandemic.
- 3.2 We know that the impact of poverty is visible at all parts of people's lives – from early childhood, to educational attainment and employment rates through to life expectancy – so to address this we need an approach that will tackle all of these issues.

3.3 By listening to our residents and learning from their lived experience we have a comprehensive, partnership based approach to tackle poverty and the impacts of poverty and to make a real and lasting difference to people's lives through:

- the Our North Tyneside Plan which includes a policy priority to tackle health and socio-economic inequalities across the borough including through the Poverty Intervention Fund
- the new health and wellbeing strategy "Equally Well : a healthier, fairer future for North Tyneside" which provides the framework for how this commitment in the Our North Tyneside Plan will be achieved
- a clear commitment to tackling poverty and the impacts of living in poverty by ensuring a healthy standard of living for all as part of the delivery plan for the "Equally Well" strategy

3.4 Since June 2020, our **Poverty Intervention Fund** and other grant funding from Government (Covid Winter Grant and the Household Support Grant) has helped to alleviate the financial, social and health impacts of poverty for families and individuals across the borough through:

- **tackling holiday hunger** by providing supermarket vouchers directly to families who are eligible for free school meals during every school holiday since December 2020 – this is £15 per week per eligible child going directly to families
- **support for school uniform or clothing** such as coats and shoes, has been provided directly both for families who are eligible for free school meals as well as other vulnerable families – this has been through a combination of
  - £45 per child provided directly to families on income related free school meals
  - £8000 worth of uniform and clothing for schools to collect and distribute to families
  - £11,000 to support some schools in a pilot to develop a school uniform recycling scheme
  - development of a school clothing scheme to support families who are not on income related free school meals
- **maximising benefits take up** via Age UK and Citizens Advice through a take up campaign plus benefits advice
- providing **free meals for older people** at the height of the pandemic from Christmas 2020 to March 2021 – over 8000 hot meals were delivered via Cedarwood Trust, Wallsend Memorial Hall, YMCA, Family Gateway, Justice Prince, Make Christmas Special and Meadowell Connected

- poverty proofing the school day to be rolled out in every single school in North Tyneside, reducing the negative impacts that living in poverty can have on educational outcomes for children and young people

- 3.5 Since Easter 2021 our **Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) programme** has supported children and young people eligible for income related free school meals to have access to meals and different activities delivered through a broad range of voluntary and community sector partners across the borough – for summer 2022 we have funded 42 community organisations who will work with up to 2000 children and young people over the summer holidays ensuring that they receive food and activities across the summer break.
- 3.6 Tackling **digital exclusion** including through the provision of devices such as laptops and access to wi-fi for schools, children and young people to ensure ongoing learning throughout the lockdown periods of the pandemic.
- 3.7 Community based support for vulnerable groups of people in **food poverty** including via
- North East Homeless
  - Out of Sight – for families caring for people with severe disabilities
  - slow cookers for households on low incomes
  - Cedarwood Trust’s food pantry
- 3.8 Support for people in **fuel poverty** through the Safe and Healthy Homes service.
- 3.9 **Direct financial support** to people who struggle to pay their bills through
- the **Council Tax support scheme** which was expanded in 2021/22 for working age claimants
  - support for housing costs via **Housing Benefit and discretionary housing payments**
  - **Healthy Start Scheme** vouchers for pregnant women and children under four in eligible low income families – to be used on milk, baby formula milk and certain foods as well as free vitamin supplements
  - **test and trace support payments** for those whose income is affected by having to self-isolate due to Covid
  - **Household Support Grant** payments to support the costs of food and utilities plus items linked to these costs
- 3.10 **Support for those in financial hardship or crisis** through our Adults and Childrens Services via
- the **welfare assistance scheme** to provide help with the food (via the food bank) or utility costs

- **section 17 payments** which under the Childrens Act 1989 can be made to provide financial assistance to address needs to safeguard and promote a child's welfare

3.11 **Tackle food poverty and food insecurity** through the introduction of **a new food club initiative in the areas most in need** – this is through **The Bread-and-Butter Thing** which was launched April 2022 and is delivered through local community hubs. This will provide a new way for people to have easy access in their local area to affordable food and help to reduce reliance on food banks. Hubs will be in the coming weeks at the venues below:

- Family Gateway – Howdon
- Shiremoor Adventure Playground/ Children's Centre
- Fordley Primary School
- Longbenton Community Centre

With the location of two more hubs still to be decided and delivered during the school summer holidays.

3.12 **Community based projects** to tackle inequalities via a new grant fund delivered in partnership with the NHS Clinical Commissioning Group (this has now been closed and funding agreed for bids)

3.13 **£150 Council Tax Energy Rebate** We estimate there are over 91,000 households eligible for the £150 council tax energy rebate.

3.14 At close of play on 20 June, we had completed the automated payments to the majority of our direct debit payers. That is 63,891 household accounts paid.

3.15 For those residents not paying by direct debit or we have not been able to make an automated payment we launched an online application process via our website on 24 May at <https://my.northtyneside.gov.uk/category/1597/council-tax-rebate-and-discretionary-payments> We have 27,126 accounts needing to apply online, and of those we have made payments of 12,140. The remaining are made up of claims that we have not been able to pay immediately as some of their pre-payment checks have failed or the household that have not claimed yet.

3.16 The closing date for claims is 31 July 2022.

3.17 To support people to make claims, we have assisted claim appointments in the customer service centres, drop in sessions in libraries as well as telephone appointments.

3.18 This has worked well, and although it has been very busy we have not been overwhelmed by the volumes of customers needing help as we staggered invites letters. For those claims that fail the pre-payment check, we are working with the Post Office to issue Payout vouchers. This should be in place over the coming weeks so we aiming to issue these mid-July. Payout vouchers are a barcode at the bottom

of the letter issued which allows the customer to go along to a Post Office and receive cash.

- 3.19 For those that have not made a claim, they will either receive their £150.00 as payment against their Council Tax liability or a Post office Payout Voucher if they do not have any liability.
- 3.20 The discretionary scheme will follow after we have dealt with the standard £150.00 Energy payments as we have until the end of November to make payments for these.

### **Household Support Grant Extension**

- 3.21 On 31 March 2022 notification was received that North Tyneside had been awarded £1,609,998.05 in government funding to support vulnerable households. This must be used by 30 September 2022. This new grant is very similar to the previous Household Support Fund in that it must be used to support financially vulnerable households with food and fuel and expenses linked to these.
- 3.22 There has been more direction in how the funding is to be applied to different groups of residents as set out below:
- at least one third to pensioners £531,299,
  - at least one third for households with children, £531,299, and
  - the remaining £531,299 to be used to top up pensionable age or households with children and also to be used for other households.
- 3.23 With the above in mind the following proposals are to be delivered:
- continue to tackle holiday hunger through funding for half term in May £15.00 per child.
  - continue to tackle holiday hunger through funding to families who have eligibility for free school meals over the summer holidays by delivering a £90 supermarket voucher.
  - support for families to join the Bread-and-Butter Scheme and other social supermarkets.
  - fund Council Tax Support pensionable age claimants with a one-off grant of £75.00 to help with the rising cost of fuel. This will be a targeted approach to provide a voucher that can be redeemed at a Pay point or Post Office for example
  - Safe and Healthy homes to provide more energy efficient boilers, based on an average support of £500
  - Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) funding to help those engaging with debt advice. Based on an average of £250.00
  - Welfare Advice Project in schools (direct support to clients like the CAB approach above)
  - Exceptional Housing costs support based on an average of £500 per customer
  - care leavers – one off grant of £100 to help with the rising cost of fuel.
  - one off grant of £750.00 to Ukrainian families who settle in their own tenancies rather than live with 'Host'
  - extension of the School Uniform Project based on £40.00 per grant
  - remaining funding to be used:

- Welfare Support team to distribute grants as previous with an application process (with referrals from partners only) and using the fund for crisis payment support.
- other projects that reduce inequalities identified through the PIF work or wider.

#### **4. Background Information**

The following documents have been used in the compilation of this report and may be inspected at the offices of the author.

N/A

#### **5. Appendices**

N/A