



EAST STAFFORDSHIRE BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT COVER SHEET

Title of Report:	Progress update on Cost of Living Initiatives	To be marked with an 'X' by Democratic Services after report has been presented
Meeting of:	Corporate Management Team – 16 October 2024	X
	Pre Cabinet- 24 October 2024	X
	Leader's / Leader of the Opposition's Advisory Group- 31 October 2024/6 th November 2024	X
	Cabinet - 18 November 2024	
	Audit Committee [DATE] / Scrutiny Regeneration, Development and Market Hall Committee [DATE] / Scrutiny Health and Well Being Committee [DATE] / Scrutiny Climate Change and Environment Committee / Scrutiny Value for Money Council Committee [DATE]	



Date 11 October 2024 Signature J. Teasdale

Chief Finance Officer: **Lloyd Haynes**

Date 10 October 2024 Signature L. Haynes

EAST STAFFORDSHIRE BOROUGH COUNCIL

Report to Cabinet

Date: 18 November 2024

REPORT TITLE: Progress update on Cost of Living Initiatives

PORTFOLIO: Communities and Regulatory Services

CHIEF OFFICER: Thomas Deery and John Teasdale

CONTACT OFFICER: Brett Atkinson / Rachel Liddle Ext. No. x1123

WARD(S) AFFECTED: Multiple

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1. To provide an update on progress in delivering cost of living support, including reducing fuel and food poverty

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1. The report provides updates on a number of Council funded support schemes, including energy efficiency measures, the Cost of Living Advisor Service, local warmer public community spaces, free food provision, and the discounted food provider The Bread and Butter Thing. Overall these schemes are performing well and are on track to deliver on their objectives.
- 2.2. This report also provides an update on relevant schemes which are externally funded from the Contain Management Outbreak Fund – Health Inequalities Directors Group (COMF – HIDG). This grant funding had a condition that the schemes were to be finalised by the 30th September 2024, and therefore any variance (underspend) will be required to be repaid back to the funder, with no further expenditure from 1st October onwards. These schemes comprise the Preventing ill health and injuries in the home revenue scheme, and the Energy Efficiency Measures – Staffordshire Warmer Homes capital project.
- 2.3. The recommendations are to consider the progress update in the report, approve an extended scope and increased grant to fund energy efficiency

measures that will reduce hazards associated with damp and mould and excess cold, and that consideration for continued financial support of the Cost of Living Advisor Service and Warmer Spaces Grant Programme be discussed as part of the 2025/26 budget process.

3. Background

- 3.1. There were a number of Cost of Living pledges in the Leadership's manifesto, with a number of support services having been announced in October 2023 after the first 100 days in office.¹

4. Contribution to Corporate Priorities

- 4.1. COM05 - Review and report on progress on delivery of cost of living support, including reducing fuel and food poverty and promote further engagement with low-income and vulnerable households.

5. Energy Efficiency Measures

5.1. Reducing Fuel Poverty

- 5.2. Beat the Cold is commissioned by LAs across the County to work in partnership with health boards to deliver fuel poverty and energy efficiency advice to residents. It aims to reduce fuel poverty and cold related ill health across the county and ensures that residents are referred to all relevant and eligible grant schemes including Staffordshire Warmer Homes, ECOflex and the Council's own Energy Efficiency Support schemes.

- 5.3. In 2023/24 they provided advice and support to 339 households which created an estimated £4,039 worth of savings from tariff advice and £29,050 worth of savings from referrals to water tariff support. In addition, 134 households were also referred for heat grants up to £450 per household with potential savings totalling £60,300.

- 5.4. It has been reported that referrals in to the service in quarter 1 have been lower than previous years, however we are anticipating increased enquiries for the remaining financial year. 71 households have been supported, 51 of which are disadvantaged due to health and/or income. 22 households were referred for water tariff support with an average £306 saving per household, 12 referrals have been made to the priority services register with an estimated £234 saving per household, 3 ECO4 referrals have been made and 4 households signposted for additional fuel voucher support.

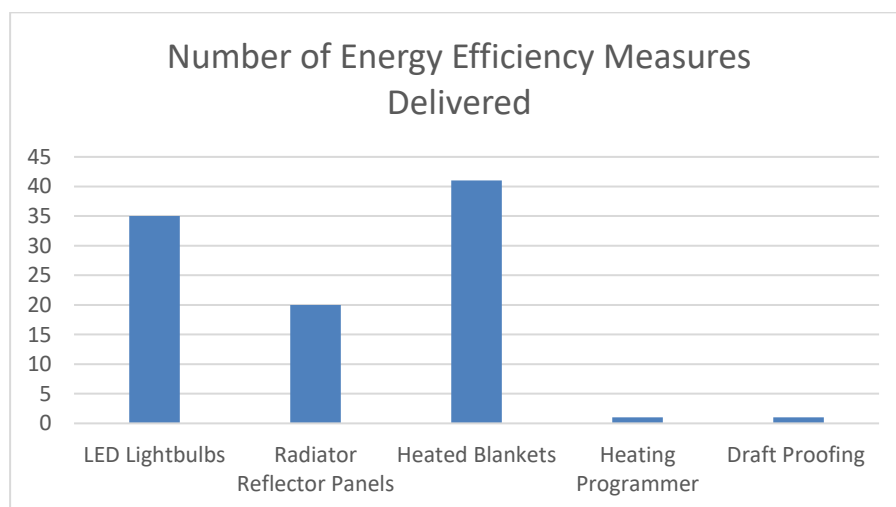
5.5. Staffs Warmer Homes/ECOflex

- 5.6. Energy efficiency improvements for vulnerable households in the Borough have continued during 23/24. The work is delivered through a number of schemes such as LAD3 (Local Authority Delivery Phase 3), HUG2 (Home

¹ <https://www.eaststaffsbc.gov.uk/news/2023/council-provide-continued-cost-living-support>

Upgrade Grant Phase 2), ECO4 LA Flex (Energy Company Obligation Phase 4, Local Authority Flex) and the GBIS (Great British Insulation Scheme).

- 5.7. In total, 61 households have received improvements such as insulation upgrades, new heating systems or renewable energy installations or will receive them in the near future.
- 5.8. An additional £50,000 has been contributed from ESBC's share of the 'Contain Outbreak Management Fund' (COMF) to target properties in East Staffordshire providing top up grants for households that fall outside of the funding criteria for the government energy efficiency grants.
- 5.9. The funding has been fully spent and has enabled 38 measures to be installed within 14 properties that would have fallen outside of the eligibility criteria for ECO4 and GBIS funding. Measures include loft insulation, wall insulation, air source heat pumps, heating controllers, Solar PV and battery storage.
- 5.10. These measures have improved the EPC of 6 properties by at least 3 EPC bands which is a significant improvement in energy efficiency.
- 5.11. Energy Efficiency Support (ESBC Cost of Living funded scheme)
- 5.12. A sum of £50,000 was made available towards improving energy efficiency in 150 residential properties. A range of measures were identified with an estimated average cost of £350 per household with a maximum £500 spend.
- 5.13. All Environmental Health Officers have received energy efficiency training to assist in identifying suitable energy efficiency measures providing advice and support to assist eligible households.
- 5.14. To date 29 households have received a range of low level energy efficiency measures as detailed below.
- 5.15. Figure 1.



- 5.16. It is acknowledged that the current provision is below target; this is largely due to delays in identifying a suitable contractor and getting the contract in place and more significantly a delay in identifying properties that need or are suitable to receive the measures. We have however identified an increasing number of properties that need significant improvement works which have been secured through enforcement action; whilst these include energy efficiency measures they are not eligible under this support.
- 5.17. As detailed in para 5.22 it is anticipated that the Healthy Homes Project will result in a significantly higher uptake of energy efficiency measures, however it is also proposed that the use of this funding is extended to include funding for measures that can reduce hazards associated with damp and mould and excess cold. This could include door/window repairs or replacement, extractor fan repair or installation, boilers repairs etc. It is also recommended that the maximum grant be increased from £500 to £2,000 to enable these works to be undertaken
- 5.18. Preventing Ill health
- 5.19. An additional £36,885 was secured from ESBC's share of the 'Contain Outbreak Management Fund' (COMF) to target the prevention of ill health and injuries in the home. This fund provides assistance to owner occupiers that are in need of assistance to improve the condition of their property to reduce ill health and injuries in the home. Along with Council mainstream funding this will support projects including:
- 5.20. To date 4 properties have been identified with significant defects including damp and mould and excess cold. Works will improve the doors, windows, roof insulation and damp proof course of these properties. .
- 5.21. The funding detailed above has been fully spent in accordance with the HIDG conditions.
- 5.22. Healthy Homes
- 5.23. The Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities have provided an additional £130,000 to fund interventions to support damp and mould complaints. Additional staffing resources have been secured to deliver the project and the aim is to further support the improvement of energy efficiency of properties within East Staffordshire.
- 5.24. The project proactively targets areas that are at greater risk from damp and mould with the provision of advice and guidance to reduce damp and mould. We also provide a referral to Beat the Cold and Staffordshire Warmer Homes for fuel poverty advice and larger energy efficiency measures along with the provision of relevant energy efficiency measures for eligible properties. This will ensure greater take up of the energy efficiency measures detailed in Paras 5.11 – 5.17 whilst also contributing to a larger piece of work addressing damp and mould.

6. **Cost of Living Advisor Service**

- 6.1. This service commenced on the 2nd October 2023, and is commissioned from Citizens Advice Mid Mercia following a competitive tender exercise. The service offers a fulltime advisor to provide hands on budgeting support to local households, and is designed to complement and link to existing services. The advisor has access to a 'personal budget' funding pot which can be spent on bespoke items to support changes the household needs to make to improve their circumstances.
- 6.2. This project has achieved an impressive set of results, a sample of the quarterly monitoring is provided at Appendix 1, with a summary for the period of operation below.
- 6.3. Figure 2: Summary of COLA Outcomes²

Period	Cases	Activities	Income Gain
Q3 23/24	62	251	£94,088
Q4 23/24	75	381	£146,069
Q1 24/25	56	354	£192,410

- 6.4. The service has been extended until 31 March 2025 to facilitate consideration for continued financial support for this resource as part of the 2025/26 budget process.

7. **Local Warmer Public Community Spaces**

- 7.1. During the winter of 2023/24 warm space provision was in operation across the Borough in both urban and rural areas, with many providers extending existing activities in community hubs during the winter months. Around 132 hours of access to warm spaces is provided in East Staffordshire each week with attendance at sessions ranging from 12 to 60 people. The warm spaces provided warm refreshments as a minimum, but many also offer additional services such as food banks, advice services and social activities. A full evaluation of the warm space services for the winter of 2023/24 is available at Appendix 2, which is confidential.
- 7.2. The Warm Spaces Grant programme has been reinstated for 2024/25 with an identical offer³ to last winter, which is accepting applications for grants of between £500 and £2,000 to be reviewed and determined by a Member-led grant panel. Grants are paid in two instalments, 50% upfront and 50% upon completion of the mid-point evaluation. Grant evaluations will be sent to all warm space providers in early January and are scheduled for review with the Cabinet Member in early February to enable the approval of the second instalment of the grant payment. The period that the programme will cover is 1 November 2024 until 31st March 2025.

² Summary of the quarterly returns provided by Citizens Advice Mid Mercia.

³ With one small exception, the overall budget for this winter has been reduced to reflect actual spend in 2023/24.

7.3. This winter will mark the third year of warm space provision, and it is suggested that continued financial support for this grant scheme is considered as part of the 2025/26 budget process.

8. Free Food Provision

8.1. Food Aid Fund

8.2. In October 2023, East Staffordshire Borough Council launched the Food Aid Fund designed to financially support up to ten free food providers at a rate of £550 a month for a six month period, across the colder winter months, aimed at supporting those organisations in more financial difficulty or hardship. At the end of each month grant recipients email the receipts and a record of the amount they have spent for monitoring purposes.⁴

8.3. All ten grants have been awarded via a Member-led grant panel to providers who cover the East Staffordshire area, with the programme having completed at the end of September 2024. The financial support went further than expected, with all 10 organisations continuing to receive payments into the summer period.

8.4. The Council has received some feedback from the recipient organisations, The Community Church (TCC) in Stapenhill have provided the following feedback on the funding:

8.5. *With the conclusion of the Food Aid funding, I am pleased to share some photographs and statistics from January to September 2024, highlighting our free food provision at The Community Church for those who are struggling to cope. Obviously, we do not photograph people receiving food parcels or individuals that are accessing our debt help service, to order to protect their privacy, but I hope overall that the photographs demonstrate that our foodbank is inclusive and welcoming. We also try to encourage visitors to the foodbank to engage in social activities as many struggle with mental health & a visit to the foodbank is sometimes the only opportunity they get to connect with other members of the community.*

8.6. *Number of visitors accessing food help service: 2,773 (January - September 2024)*

8.7. *In some cases, as explained previously, handing out food parcels isn't always the most effective way to help. For individuals without utilities or facilities to prepare meals, we cook the food for them, and provide hot meals. This approach is particularly important for those accessing our Debt Relief help, who often face extreme circumstances.*

⁴ A number of organisations have found that their grant award has lasted longer than a month, which extends the period of cover of the scheme and indicates that the amount offered meets the needs of number of the recipient organisations.

8.11. Community Kitchens Initiative

- 8.12. A community kitchen, also known as a collective kitchen, is a community-based program which offers a shared space in which people can prepare food with the intention of tackling poverty and isolation. The Council accepted applications for grants to open community kitchens from October 2023 until March 2024 following a specific manifesto commitment. This is a pilot initiative for the Council, and as a result the application scheme was designed to foster innovation with the intention of supporting the development a community led solution which helps to address nutrition and food poverty in local areas.
- 8.13. So far there have been 3 successful applicants for support from the initiative, Uttoxeter Heath Community Cupboard, Princess Training Centre and The Women's Collective Community Kitchen Project (in partnership with Humanity Unites). The Uttoxeter Heath and Princess Training Centre projects have now successfully completed their proposed period of operation, and The Women's Collective Community Kitchen continues to operate on a monthly basis until March 2025.
- 8.14. The Women's Collective Community Kitchen have shared the following description of a recent session:
- 8.15. *Community Kitchen Evaluation, Tuesday 2nd July 2024*
- 8.16. *A Bangladeshi experience awaited the 58 diners at July's Community Kitchen event. The evening was designed and catered for by the Bangladeshi kitchen team members, ably assisted by members of their families and friends. It was a real multi-generational effort with contributions from teenage daughters to grandmothers.*
- 8.17. *As the delicious aroma of home-cooked food drifted from the kitchen, guests were able to gather some interesting facts about Bangladesh from the Bangla News, such as the huge number of rivers flowing through the country (700). We could also try entertaining ourselves by exchanging greetings in the Sylheti dialect. Before food was served, we had great fun in our teams, vying for victory in the quiz and 'put on a sari' challenge.*
- 8.18. *The wonderful spread of food certainly lived up to expectations: naga chicken wings; dali bora; fish/meat curries and dhaal...it was a struggle to fit it all on the rice! For dessert, we were treated to payesh, shemai and sagoo balls. Unbelievably, this all came in well under budget, costing £237.*
- 8.19. *Service and clean up went smoothly thanks to many hands on deck but there were some very tired faces at the end of the night, especially among the Bangladeshi women who had worked so hard. Due to logistical problems, it was necessary for some of the women to bring their young children and this did add to the stress factor. It served as proof that the policy decision to generally exclude children from events was a good one.*

8.20. *The cooks and kitchen team were sporting a rainbow assortment of Community Kitchen aprons all beautifully printed with a brilliant CK logo designed by Alesha.*

8.21. Figure 5. Advertisement for the Women’s Collective Community Kitchen⁵



9. **Introduction of ‘The Bread and Butter Thing’ (TBBT)**

- 9.1. Excess public health funding has been invested into a three year grant award which secures low cost food service that will provide mobile food ‘hubs’ to deprived areas of the borough, providing residents with additional routes to access affordable food.⁶
- 9.2. TBBT offer a tried and tested method of providing discounted food at community locations known as ‘hubs’. They have a large foot print in the North of England,⁷ and have been featured at a number of LGA webinars and conferences. TBBT have a network to acquire surplus food,⁸ primarily further up the food chain with supplier and producers. This surplus food is then made available to members of TBBT on a weekly basis at designated locations known as ‘hubs’. Each week

⁵ [Community Kitchen \(@twc_communitykitchen\) • Instagram photos and videos](#)

⁶ Confidential EDR no. 129.24

⁷ <https://www.breadandbutterthing.org/become-a-member>

⁸ <https://www.breadandbutterthing.org/food-surplus>

9.6. The Council has entered into a grant agreement with TBBT for the provision of 5 hubs based on one hub each day Monday through Friday, as this represents optimum usage of the chilled van that will serve the borough.⁹ Each chilled van can carry 80 units at any one time, i.e. 80 x 3 shopping bags delivered 5 days a week. The grant agreement requires the hubs to be delivered 52 weeks a year for 3 years, thereafter TBBT may close a hub if the active membership drops below 60 – but TBBT hasten to point out that they have not pulled out of any hubs since their inception in 2016.

9.6.1. Rental agreements with 5 suitably located community centres / venues across the borough which can host the activity for 3 hours on a weekday afternoon.

9.7. An evaluation of suitable locations has been conducted and rental / room hire agreements have been entered into with the 4 venues for the relevant period each week. TBBT have attended the 4 venues listed below and determined that they are suitable for the activity. Equally, the 4 community centres have discussed what is required with TBBT staff and are positive about supporting the TBBT scheme.

9.8. Figure 6: Proposed Timetable of TBBT Hubs

Day	Venue
Monday	TBC, venue to be identified following introduction of the other 4 listed below.
Tuesday	Waterside Community Centre, DE15 9LF
Wednesday	Queen Street Community Centre, DE14 3LW
Thursday	Burton Soup Kitchen, DE14 2ED
Friday	Uttoxeter Heath Community Centre, ST14 7DP

9.9. The food and volunteers will arrive at 12 midday, with users of the service attending to collect their shopping at 2pm, and the session concluding at 3pm. Although a grant agreement was formally entered into during June 2024 there has been delay due to the lead in time for delivery of a new chilled van.

⁹ Part of the grant funding has been utilised to purchase a chilled van to facilitate delivery of the discounted food.

9.10. As a result of the extended lead in time, another van has been provided with the first hub due to open in Uttoxeter on the 11 November. The other hubs will open shortly thereafter. Initial discussions have begun to identify a 5th and final hub.

10. **Financial Considerations**

This section has been approved by the following member of the Financial Management Unit: PF/NL/AB/Daniel Binks

10.1. The main financial issues arising from this Report are as follows:

10.1.1. External grant funding has been received to increase the assistance that can be provided for Energy Efficiency Measures as detailed below:

	Funding Available	Total Amount Spent
ECO Flex Top up Grant (Staffordshire Warmer Homes) Capital Project	£50,000	£50,000
Reducing Ill Health and Injuries in the Home	£36,885	£36,885

10.1.2. The ESBC Cost of Living funded Energy Efficiency measures had an original budget of £50,000. Expenditure of £4,201 occurred during 2023/24, with a carry forward of £45,799 into the current financial year. The remaining funding is available to finance improvements during the remainder of this financial year, and increasing the maximum grant for the Energy Efficiency Measures (Cost of Living) from £500 to £2,000, as highlighted in Para 5.17 will increase the value of the interventions per household, and expedite the use of the funding. This will be offset by reducing the number of homes where assistance is provided

10.1.3. Section 6 and 7, the Cost of Living Advisor Service and Warmer Spaces Grant Programme respectively, are funded from a Cost of Living Scheme budget carry forward into 2024/25 of £52,056. £24,500 allocated to the Cost of Living Advisor Service and £22,030 allocated to Warmer Spaces Grant Programme.

10.1.4. Section 9 of the report details a new cost of living initiative, working in partnership with a charity - The Bread and Butter Thing (TBBT). In return for £150,000, TBBT for three years, 2024/25 to 2026/27, will manage the sourcing, transport and storage of the surplus food, alongside running and administering the scheme for residents. The Council will further pay for the premises costs for each of the five hubs, estimated at £15,000 per annum. The majority of funding will come from grant funding and it is also proposed that earmarked reserves could be used to fund the premises rental cost element, as required.

11. **Risk Assessment and Management**

11.1. The main risks to this Report and the Council achieving its objectives are as follows:

11.2. **Positive** (Opportunities/Benefits):

11.2.1. The Council has engaged a range of support mechanisms for residents, focussed on areas where cost of living pressures are likely to be at their most acute.

11.2.2. The Energy Efficiency Measures provide support to residents that are affected by the rising energy prices and the removal of the winter fuel allowance by improving the energy efficiency of their property. They work in conjunction with our fuel poverty advice service, Beat the Cold and Staffordshire Warmer Homes to ensure that residents are accessing all the support and funding that is currently available.

11.2.3. TBBT introduces access to affordable food in community locations to supplement existing services and reduce pressure on the same, whilst improving the range of affordable fresh food available to local communities.

11.3. **Negative** (Threats):

11.3.1. The TBBT scheme is untested locally, despite having a good reputation nationally.

11.4. The risks do not need to be entered in the Risk Register. Any financial implications to mitigate against these risks are considered above.

12. **Legal Considerations**

*This section has been approved by the following member of the Legal Team:
Glen McCusker – Locum Solicitor and Deputy Monitoring Officer*

12.1. The main legal issues arising from this Report are as follows:

12.1.1. Legal Services have prepared all of the Grant Agreements with the various community groups.

12.1.2. The Grant Agreement with the Bread and Butter Thing commenced on 13th March 2024, and will run for a period of 3 years.

12.1.3. The Contract with the Citizens Advice commenced on 2nd October 2023, and has been extended until 31st March 2025.

13. **Equalities and Health**

13.1. **Equality impacts:** The subject of this Report is not a policy, strategy, function or service that is new or being revised. An equality and health impact assessment is not required.

13.2. **Health impacts:** The outcome of the health screening question does not require a full Health Impact Assessment to be completed.

14. Data Protection Implications – Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA)

14.1. A DPIA must be completed where there are plans to:

- use systematic and extensive profiling with significant effects;
- process special category or criminal offence data on a large scale; or
- systematically monitor publicly accessible places on a large scale
- use new technologies;
- use profiling or special category data to decide on access to services;
- profile individuals on a large scale;
- process biometric data;
- process genetic data;
- match data or combine datasets from different sources;
- collect personal data from a source other than the individual without providing them with a privacy notice ('invisible processing');
- track individuals' location or behaviour;
- profile children or target marketing or online services at them; or
- process data that might endanger the individual's physical health or safety in the event of a security breach

14.2 Following consideration of the above, there are no Data Protection implications arising from this report which would require a DPIA.

15. Human Rights

15.1. There are no Human Rights issues arising from this Report.

16. Sustainability (including climate change and change adaptation measures)

16.1. Does the proposal result in an overall positive effect in terms of sustainability (including climate change and change adaptation measures) N/A

17. Recommendation(s)

17.1. To consider the progress update in the report.

17.2. To approve the extended scope of works for Energy Efficiency Measures and increase the grant to £2000 to fund measures to reduce hazards associated with damp, mould and excess cold.

17.3. That consideration for continued financial support of the Cost of Living Advisor Service and Warmer Spaces Grant Programme be discussed as part of the 2025/26 budget process.

18. Background Papers

18.1. None identified.

19. **Appendices**

19.1. Appendix 1: Key Stats CoLA Q3 [2 Apr 24 – 28 Jun 24]

19.2. Appendix 2: Warm Spaces Evaluation 2023/24 [CONFIDENTIAL]