

## **Cabinet Meeting on Wednesday 17 January 2024**

### **Here to Help – Progress Update**



**Councillor Victoria Wilson, Cabinet member for Communities and Culture said,**

“As a county council, we want to do everything we can to support people to lead happy and independent lives, but recognise too that some residents also may need a little extra hand to help with increasing costs over the colder months.

“Our Holiday Activity & Food programme has for example already supported 199,000 free sessions for eligible children and our Here to Help campaign has signposted people to the wider financial and community support they

may benefit from.

“We have worked collaboratively with our partners across all the district and borough councils to ensure we can work together to make sure we target people who may need the help and will continue to do so over the winter and spring months.”

### **Report Summary:**

Ensuring our residents live in thriving and sustainable communities is one of the top priority outcomes within our Strategic Plan 2022-26. To support that priority this report provides a progress update on the range of support, initiatives and signposting activities which have been undertaken by the County Council to enable our residents to manage cost of living pressures over the last 12 months.

The report outlines our approach to supporting residents along with work which has been undertaken by front line service areas as part of their “business as usual” activities. Furthermore, it also includes a summary of the work we are doing with the Staffordshire Centre for Data Analytics (SCDA) and updates on the joint work we are involved with through the Cost of Living Partnership Group (COLPG) work and next steps for consideration.

## **Recommendations**

This report recommends that Cabinet:

- a. Notes how the County Council has supported Staffordshire residents to manage cost-of-living pressures.
- b. Agrees the proposed next steps set out in paragraph 19.
- c. Notes and supports that the continued delivery of the County Council's Strategic plan through investment in early years provision, education, skills, training and by attracting first class businesses to the county, while supporting existing businesses to thrive and prosper, will support the long-term prosperity of Staffordshire residents.



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### **Here to Help – Progress Update**

#### **Recommendations of the Cabinet Member for Communities and Culture**

This report recommends that Cabinet:

- a. Notes how the County Council has supported Staffordshire residents to manage cost-of-living pressures.
- b. Agrees the proposed next steps set out in paragraph 19.
- c. Notes and supports that the continued delivery of the County Council's Strategic plan through investment in early years provision, education, skills, training and by attracting first class businesses to the county, while supporting existing businesses to thrive and prosper, will support the long-term prosperity of Staffordshire residents.

#### **Local Member Interest:**

N/A

#### **Report of the Director for Economy, Infrastructure and Skills**

#### **Reasons for Recommendations:**

##### **Introduction:**

1. The County Council continues to prioritise support to vulnerable residents facing cost-of-living pressures. Our approach has focussed on ensuring our communities are enabled to help themselves and each other and making it as easy as possible to find the information they need to do this.
2. Key to this approach is working in partnership with our local authority and Voluntary and Community Sector Partners. In December 2022, the Staffordshire Leaders Board agreed to the establishment of a Cost-of-Living Partnership Group, with representatives from the County, Borough, and Districts, with the aim of ensuring a joined-up approach where possible.
3. Prior to this and across 2022-23 the County Council's leadership role included providing residents with information, advice, and signposting to local community support. This included a focus on our residents helping themselves and each other, as well as linking with partners to co-ordinate efforts where possible.

4. To achieve this, we created the 'Here to Help' campaign and a new section on our website which collated advice, guidance, and support into a single place. We also made sure that any associated programmes and funding were linked and well communicated to residents, businesses, the VCSE sector, to maximise the support available. Support and advice were also communicated internally to our staff.
5. Since the 'Here to Help' approach first launched there has also been significant support provided across the county by our VCSE partners and by communities supporting each other.
6. This report provides an opportunity for the County Council to consider progress to date and look ahead to those key next steps, before also taking an update back to the Staffordshire Leaders Board to explore further opportunities for joint working.
7. This report includes a summary of the support and guidance that has been made available to residents. Also included is an overview of the Staffordshire Centre for Data Analytics (SCDA) 'Cost-of-living Data Project' and progress update on the Cost-of-Living Partnership Group.
8. The report makes several recommendations for consideration including continued signposting for individuals and communities, supplemented by targeted interventions made available through existing programmes, continued investment in education and skills to support the long-term prosperity of Staffordshire residents and working closely with partners.

### **Here-to-Help Progress Update:**

9. This report highlights a selection of key initiatives and support that have been delivered to date, with further details in Appendix 1 - Cost-of-living support – Progress Update.

### **Here to Help Campaign**

10. In October 2022 the County Council launched the '**Here to Help**' campaign, which underpins our approach to supporting residents with cost-of-living pressures.
11. A summary of key highlights between October 2022 - June 2023 is set out below and more detail can be found in Appendix 1 and 2:
  - a. **21,000+ people visited** the web area with **71,000+ total page views**.
  - b. **171 mentions in the wider media** with stories covered on television by BBC Midlands Today and ITV Central.

- c. **1,600 clicks** through to the webpages generated from our 57 social media posts reaching **approximately 83,000 people**.
  - d. **6,500+** Staffordshire residents engaged with Here to Help email newsletter.
  - e. **18,000+ leaflets were distributed** for people who may be digitally excluded.
12. A renewed **Here to Help** campaign (phase 2) for winter 2023/24 winter is outlined in Appendix 3.

### **Associated Programmes & Funding**

13. Additional pre-existing campaigns and programmes have further complemented our Here to Help approach, providing additional practical support to residents. These are outlined below, with more information included at Appendix 1 (Section 2).
- a. **Holiday Activity & Food programme** - Free activities for school aged children in Easter, Summer, and Christmas holidays. To date providers across the County have enabled 199,000 free places to children.
  - b. **Household Support Fund** - Supporting those households facing financial hardship to meet essential costs such as food and utilities. The County Council has been allocated £27.5m (including 2023/24) to support vulnerable residents. 290,457 people have benefitted during the last two years.
  - c. **Members Community Fund** – Approximately £1m allocated to assist local organisations, and in turn supporting residents with cost-of-living pressures.
  - d. **Community Recovery Fund** – 51 applications for assistance approved with £186,000 awarded to VCSE groups and organisations during 2022/23, helping residents to recover from the pandemic's impact and address cost-of-living pressures.
  - e. **Warmer Homes Scheme** - Installation of over 450 heating solutions to residents' homes across the County, resulting in an estimated saving of £650,000 for residents on their annual heating bills.

### **Front Line Service Support**

14. Front line community-facing services continue to provide significant support to residents managing cost-of-living pressures. Some of this activity has been delivered alongside the wider support offered above and through business-as-usual activity. This includes:
- a. **County Council and Community Managed Libraries** - Providing warm welcoming spaces to residents, as well as saving families an

estimated £60,000 since 2020 by providing Pre-Loved Uniform Markets.

- b. **Family Hubs** - Collecting and distributing toys for children and families over the Christmas period. Our Family Hubs have also been administering and delivering the Household Support Fund.
- c. **Community Learning Service** - Providing free adult learning courses to help residents up-skill and/or re-train to enhance their income and career objectives.
- d. **Business and Enterprise Team** - Providing support to businesses via the "Growth Hubs".
- e. **Armed Forces Community** - Supported with dedicated information and guidance as well as support from the Veterans Foundation Grant Scheme.

### **Staffordshire Centre for Data Analytics (SCDA) - Cost-of-living Data Project**

15. The SCDA has undertaken a project commissioned by Public Health to source and combine datasets with the view of providing greater insight on households who are at risk of becoming, or are already vulnerable, due to the cost-of-living pressures.
16. The next stage of the project is to use the data gathered to further engage with colleagues and partners, including Borough and District Councils, to understand the impact of the work, and what actions can be taken. The idea being that partners can better target resources at a local level, to both enable households to manage cost-of-living pressures and to hopefully prevent them needing future support. Ultimately, this approach should assist with building more sustainable and resilient communities.

### **Cost-of-living Partnership Group**

17. The Cost-of-Living Partnership Group (COLPG) was created at the request of the Staffordshire Leaders Board and includes representatives from the County Council and all district and borough partners. The group has met during 2023 to explore opportunities for joint working and share good practice and learning. The group propose to undertake the following over the next 6 months:
  - a. Continue to promote a collaborative and joined up approach with Borough & District partners, enabling signposting of residents to sources of advice and support as applicable.
  - b. Continue to promote the "Here to Help" campaign and explore opportunities for Borough & District partners to jointly support this.
  - c. Provide progress updates on the work of the COLPG.

### **Conclusion and Next Steps:**

18. This report summarises the work that has been undertaken during the last year, by the County Council in collaboration with Borough, and District partners, VCSE partners and within our communities, to support residents with the ongoing cost-of-living pressures.
19. It is recommended that Cabinet notes how the County Council has enabled Staffordshire residents to manage cost-of-living pressures and agrees the proposed next steps:
  - a. Use the data collated by the Staffordshire Centre for Data Analytics (SCDA) Project and work with partners to support targeted activity.
  - b. Measure the impact of the Winter Here to Help campaign.
  - c. Continue to work jointly through the Cost-of-living Partnership Group, providing an update to the Staffordshire CEOs Group and Leaders Board.

### **Legal Implications**

20. N/A

### **Resource and Value for Money Implications**

21. The continued delivery of the County Councils Strategic plan through investment in early years provision, education, skills, training and by attracting first class businesses to the county, while supporting existing businesses to thrive and prosper, will support the long-term prosperity of Staffordshire residents.
22. The Here to Help campaign has been resourced by the Communications team.

### **Climate Change Implications**

23. Installation of over 450 heating solutions to residents' homes across the County through the Warmer Homes Scheme, has reduced the number of homes with inefficient heating which has helped to reduce carbon emissions.

### **List of Background Documents/Appendices:**

- Appendix 1 – Staffordshire County Council – Cost-of-living Progress Update
- Appendix 2 – Here to Help Campaign – Communications Summary 22/23
- Appendix 3 – Here to Help Campaign – Winter 2023/24

## Contact Details

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