

Committee: FULL COUNCIL

Date: 27 September 2022

Title: Cost of living crisis

Purpose of Report

For members to consider possible strategies and actions for dealing with the “Cost of Living Crisis”

Recommendation:

Members to note the report and identify Members to produce strategies for consideration at the October Full Council meeting.

Report:

1. The UK is experiencing a significant cost of living crisis due to a number of factors resulting in higher fuel and energy prices, increased food prices and a rise in inflation which is affecting residents in most socio-economic brackets.
2. Whilst we continue to look to the UK government to mitigate the worst impact of these rising costs it is likely that new local innovations and greater local coordination might assist and therefore the council may wish to explore the options open to it.
3. Nationally To date the government have announced:
 - A £650 one off payment for all residents on benefits (to be paid in two halves)
 - A £400 energy grant to all households (non-repayable)
 - A £150 Council Tax rebate for all houses bands D to A
 - A £300 Pensioner cost of living payment
 - A £150 Disability payment. In addition, residents have access to the Winter Fuel payment and Household Support Fund.
4. According to the Joseph Rowntree Foundation a household with two adults and two school aged children, with a mortgage/rent of £800 and gas/electric costs of £160 per month need a combined income of above £35,824 per year to stay above the Minimum Income Standard and an income of £40,400 for a ‘decent’ income.

5. A two-person household, with no children, needs a minimum income of £27,340 per year, a net income of £485.73 per week, for a minimum decent standard of living (<https://www.minimumincome.org.uk>). The UK average salary at the start of 2022 was £24,600 (HMRC).
6. In March 2022 nearly a quarter (23%) of adults reported that it was very difficult or difficult to pay their usual household bills in the last month, compared with a year ago (ONS Cost of Living and its impact).
7. Somerset County Council are currently looking at ways to further support residents' financial resilience through work with Credit Unions and food resilience using a number of projects and initiatives.
8. There will be other initiatives in the district and county councils and priorities identified by a wide range of local and regional, third sector organisations to further support residents during the cost-of-living crisis and the practical steps they might take to mitigate the impact.
9. We have already been asked to notify Somerset County Council of any spaces that the council owns or manages that might be used as a "Warm Space" in the coming months.
10. As such we have notified them of North Street as this is the only Town Council area that is currently feasible for such use. However as members are aware, this would have limitations due to the accessibility issues with the building. It is not really suitable in anything other than the very short term.
11. Because the council does not have any resources itself to commit to addressing this issue the main way in which it might be able to help the community is to gather and co-ordinate a list of spaces that could be made available by the various organisations and businesses that could facilitate "warm spaces".
12. Due to its own heating issues, the Minster Church is not going to be a suitable venue at this moment in time, but there are other areas than may be at various times in the week.
13. Whilst heating is clearly a major concern at the moment there are in fact four main areas that members may ultimately need to consider, Income, Food, Fuel and Housing.
14. In each of the four main areas members may wish to identify:
 - What do members think they know about the issue locally?
 - What evidence do members have that shows that each of the identified aspects is an issue in Ilminster?

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- What partners members believe we should be working with, and can they, by working together, identify the gaps in provision for Ilminster's community?
 - How best to engage with the town and individuals who are currently having problems so that misguided proposals are not implemented?
15. It is clear that Ilminster Town Council has limited powers and resources to solve the problems, but it may be that with four County Councillors living in or near Ilminster that they will be able to help provide solutions from a County perspective.
16. To advance this in the coming months individual members may wish to identify strategies and opportunities to address some of the concerns that are voiced at the meeting. They could then report these in a co-ordinated report to all members at the October meeting of Full Council.
17. Members to note the report and identify members to produce strategies for consideration at the October Full Council meeting.

Mark Tredwin
Town Clerk
September 2022