



Staffordshire Leaders Board

Cost of Living - Partnership Group

March 2024

1. Recommendations: *That the Leaders Board:*

- 1.1. Agree that the Cost-of-Living workstream is merged with and led by the Health Inequalities Directors Group (HIDG), ensuring continued and joined-up work avoiding duplication.
- 1.2. Agree that an information sharing platform for Cost of Living initiatives is maintained for all authorities utilising a dedicated Microsoft Teams Channel

2. Introduction

- 2.1. Local government across Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent continues to provide significant support and assistance to residents and businesses to help with the ongoing cost-of-living pressures.
- 2.2. Following a report in December 2022, the Leaders Board agreed to establish a 'Staffordshire cost of living partnership group' to ensure partners continue to collaborate locally where appropriate, including sharing best practice, as well as ensuring residents are signposted to all relevant support and guidance.
- 2.3. Acknowledging the refreshed Leaders Board Membership since the partnership group was initially formed, it will be important to ensure that opportunities to further join-up across partners continues to be explored and maximised.
- 2.4. It is also important to note that there continues to be significant support provided to residents by our voluntary, community and social enterprise sector (VCSE), and by our residents supporting each other.

3. Overview of work undertaken and current position

- 3.1. Since the group was established, it has met quarterly over the last year and has brought together representatives from the County Council, Borough, and District partners.
- 3.2. The group's purpose has been to share information, raise awareness and encourage joined up working where possible across all partners to assist Staffordshire residents with the rising cost of living.





- 3.3. Over the last 12 months the group has successfully promoted multiple initiatives which have been led by individual areas as well as initiatives which have been delivered in combination between one or more areas and the County Council.
- 3.4. It would be an impossible task to map out all of the activity and support that is available, so this paper highlights a selection of key initiatives and support which have been delivered and promoted through the Cost of Living Partnership Group:
 - 3.4.1. Partners have provided **warm and welcoming spaces** for residents over the winter periods in 2023 and now in 2024. These have helped people to save money in terms of heating their own homes while at the same time accessing safe, warm venues in each borough and district. In almost all cases residents have also been able to seek advice on other cost saving initiatives and available funding, as well having the added benefit of meeting new people which has also helped to tackle social isolation.
 - 3.4.2. Borough and District partners have been working alongside organisations such as Citizens Advice to deliver additional support and advice to residents to **maximise incomes and address ongoing debt** concerns on top of the usual provisions.
 - 3.4.3. There have also been examples where partners have been working with **food bank providers** in each area, in different ways and to address local needs. For example, this has been through providing grant funding to those providers, and other situations bringing together multiple providers to share resources.
 - 3.4.4. The group has also heard from and promoted the ongoing work of the **Staffordshire Centre for Data Analytics** (SCDA) and the extensive **Cost of Living Data Project**. This uses a data model to enable partners to access detailed information on their areas to ascertain which residents are most likely to be vulnerable or at risk of becoming vulnerable due to the cost of living pressures.
- 3.5. In all cases where initiatives have been shared with the partnership group they have been met with support and have prompted further discussions and information sharing amongst representatives which has ultimately enabled areas to consider different ways of working, based on shared good practice.
- 3.6. During recent partnership group meetings, it was noted that the updates being provided linked to those being shared as part of the Health Inequalities Directors Group (HIDG) meetings.
- 3.7. As a result, representatives who attend COLPG and the HIDG proposed disbanding the COLPG and merging the Cost of Living workstream with the HIDG to avoid duplication and enable future collaboration. This was raised informally at the HIDG meeting on 11 January 2024 where it was agreed that a formal request would be made at the Leaders Board.

4. Conclusion





- 4.1. There is a substantial amount of positive work that has and continues to take place to support residents with the cost of living pressures from across the public sector and within our communities. This report provides a summary of key activities and support led by local authorities. This paper suggests the below next steps in support of the Recommendations, as outlined in section 1.

5. Next Steps

- 5.1. Cost of Living work should be merged and led by the Health Inequalities Directors Group (HIDG) ensuring continued joined up work which avoids duplication.
- 5.2. The established information sharing platform for Cost-of-Living initiatives will be maintained utilising a dedicated Microsoft Teams channel and representatives from Stoke-on-Trent City Council will be invited to join ensuring join-up across the City and County.

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