

Cost of living action plan- June 2023 update

As a council, and a city, we have a long-standing commitment to tackling poverty, as set out most recently in the Sheffield Tackling Poverty Framework. We have been working together as partners before and throughout the pandemic to support people in crisis across the city and have focused on both the causes and impacts of poverty – responding to day-to-day issues whilst planning for prevention.

Whilst we will continue to take forward this wider work, we are now facing an unprecedented cost-of-living crisis which also necessitates an emergency response, which is being co-ordinated by a Cost-of-Living Crisis Strategy Group.

Aim

This action plan sets out how we have focused, and will continue to focus our efforts in the coming months to respond to this crisis and how we will work with the people and communities of Sheffield to help mitigate the significant challenges they will be facing, with a particular focus on those who are struggling the most.

How are we prioritising our effort?

- **Identify where we can pull levers in the city:** There are many wider forces which are beyond our control so we need to focus on what we *can* influence.
- **Scale of impact:** This might be small impact on a large number of people (e.g. communications), or larger impact on people who are struggling the most or who are more vulnerable. This includes understanding and addressing the distinct impacts on different communities in our city
- **Prevention where possible, while responding to urgent crisis:** Identify smaller actions we can take together now to prevent more severe crisis later, while recognising that people are, and will be, in crisis and require emergency support too
- **Draw on people's strengths:** Prioritise actions that enable people to draw on their own strengths rather than treating them as a passive recipient of something that someone else has decided is best for them. Strive to be a gateway rather than gatekeeper to the support people are entitled to.
- **Evidence-based interventions:** Inform our actions using data and intelligence, recognising that sometimes our best knowledge, particularly in a fast-changing situation, is based on personal stories.

What do we want do?

Objectives

1. Support people to make the best possible choices about how they use the income they have
2. Help people maximise their income further (including but not limited to benefits maximisation)
3. Provide a central place to gather information about the scale and nature of the crisis, especially how it is developing over time, in order to prioritise actions and to amplify personal stories
4. Do what we can to ensure that emergency support is available when people are in financial crisis
5. Co-ordinate support for the people and communities that need it the most
6. Put people experiencing the cost of living crisis at the heart of Sheffield's approach to recovery and delivering clean, inclusive growth including supporting people to respond to rising fuel prices, while preparing the whole city for long-term trends

How will we do this?

We will approach this work through the following workstreams:

- Communications and information sharing
- Providing direct and indirect access to support (emergency and longer-term)
- Data and intelligence
- Support to and from businesses
- Responding as landlord and creditor
- Responding as employers
- Responding to what matters to specific groups
- Funding and Infrastructure

The table below sets out the actions we are planning to take across all of these workstreams, with a focus on how we are delivering against the objectives described above. This includes areas of work which are already underway, as well as planned activity and/or areas for further development.

This action plan is still having details added – if something is missing that does not necessarily mean there is no activity to address it

Workstream	Objectives supported by workstream	Actions	What has been done?	What is the impact?	What next?
Communications and information sharing	Supporting people to make the best possible choices about how they use the income they have	Targeted, consistent communications directing residents and frontline workers towards helpful resources and links – some resources will be national and some local.	A ‘NeighbourGood’ Cost of living support leaflet for the public and public-facing website. Information for frontline staff including toolkit, training and ‘Worrying about Money?’ leaflets printed and distributed.	Positive feedback from partners on postcards and leaflets- more printed due to high demand they have been widely used in VCF organisations and across the public sector including the NHS.	Continued communications promoting the most up-to-date sources of information.
	Helping people to maximise their income further (including, but not limited to, benefit maximisation)	Includes direct messaging and information via employees – to inform themselves and also households they are supporting/in contact with.	Social media channels with simple, regular messages either specifically to signpost services (HSF) or to the hub webpage or Welcome Places. GovDelivery weekly messages in the news bulletin + partner newsletter.	19,622 hits to CoL webpage Bulletin opened by at least 25k people per week.	We will continue to work with the VCF and partners to understand what the demand is for different kinds of communications and where any gaps in information are, including using data to inform a more targeted approach to comms for specific groups.
	Co-ordinate support for the people and communities that need it the most	Information for frontline staff/those who are supporting others on financial support available. - Ongoing frontline worker briefings being developed. Some are targeted at anyone	NeighbourGood postcard and online frontline worker toolkit and training sessions delivered. Provides 199 CoL digitalresources held in 1 Toolkit and brings together hundreds or organisations	10% councils web page use CoL related.	
			Internal comms channels (intranet, weekly message, bulletins Pull up banners, editable posters.	Bulletin opened by at least 25k people per week. 10% councils web page use CoL related.	
					The Cost-of-Living Support Hub will continue with its programme of engagement in community and DWP events, schools. Exploring the use of Deep dives in communities, learning

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		<p>supporting households; some are for specific SCC staff.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Are there opportunities to link up these communications across organisations in the city? 	<p>providing preventative services in the City.</p> <p>The Cost-of-Living Support Hub has also supported over 55 partner and community events across the city.</p> <p>Videos on different services/resources for frontline workers around CoL have been added to the toolkit and circulated in communications e.g. Sheffield Credit Union services etc.</p>	<p>charge/case load etc, thus increasing the potential reach beyond that initial unique click. (Total unique clicks to date 4,510) Interactions from one click alone has the potential to lead to multiple interactions on a direct web link containing helpful links on other pages or phone numbers etc.</p>	<p>from the success of these during the Covid-19 response. Toolkit and frontline worker refresher training.</p>
		<p>Include Council Tax Support information in communications to residents and explore other ways to improve CTS take-up.</p>	<p>Discussions with Citizens Advice to understand issues. Video with Citizens Advice and CoL Support Hub in our CoL bulletin and on social media, raising awareness of council tax support.</p>	<p>Monitoring CTS take-up and working with Citizens Advice to understand issues residents are facing.</p>	<p>Continue to share communications around this and review our approach as a creditor, including where someone is in debt to more than one part of the council, or where they are struggling to afford Council Tax.</p>
<i>Providing direct and indirect access to support (emergency)</i>	<p>Do what we can to ensure that emergency support is provided when</p>	<p>Delivering hardship funds when people are in crisis.</p>	<p>Community Support Helpline has distributed £20m in hardship support to those affected by the Cost-of-Living crisis in the last 18 months via the Household Support</p>	<p>We have provided 172, 198 people with financial support via the HSF, further people have been</p>	<p>Household Support Fund Review- proposals in separate paper. Consider options for improving access to debt advice.</p>

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and longer-term)	<p>people are in financial crisis</p> <p>Helping people to maximise their income further (including, but not limited to, benefit maximisation)</p>		<p>Fund, Local Assistance Scheme, and 3 Energy Support schemes.</p> <p>Funds disbursement tool rolled out to get funds to people faster.</p> <p>Benefit maximisation- appointment based process triggered by grant application went live in Oct 22. Average.</p>	<p>supported through other schemes.</p> <p>In the last 6 months 85% of those who completed the benefit maximisation process were indicated as entitled to more benefits than they are receiving on average £431 per month this number has increased from £259 after the first month of the pilot.</p>	
		“NeighbourGood” Welcome Places	<p>Alongside our VCFS partners, we have created a network of 173 Welcome Places. These have provided spaces for people to access help or just call in to get ‘warm’ have a cup of tea and a chat, in their local communities. Included in the Welcome Places are council-run libraries and Family Hubs, which provide early help, early years support and other ‘Start to Life’ services for families.</p>	<p>Developed a shared local agenda around access to support for Cost of Living through the Welcome Place Network. Enabled communities to reconnect with their local services such as libraries and family centres post COVID.</p>	<p>Build on our successes in creating a network of Welcome Places working with Local Communities to co design tailored package of support services specific to that locality’s needs. Including the co-location of staff and services based on local needs and demand. The CoL team have been piloting this at the Moor Market Welcome Place. SPF funded cost-of-living link workers will support this development.</p>

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		Government-funded payment of £150 Council Tax Energy Rebate completed during 2022.	All customers who pay by direct debit were paid direct to their bank accounts. Others received letters allowing them to collect from the Post Office . Where vouchers were not cashed after 3 months their Council Tax account was be credited.	£150 paid direct to households who are affected by the cost-of-living crisis.	Wider review of our approach as a creditor, including where someone is in debt to more than one part of the council, or where they are struggling to afford Council Tax.
		<p>The ‘One Route In’ project to review SCC hardship schemes is underway. This project aims to simplify access to SCC crisis support (creating a ‘one route in’) and to direct people towards schemes that maximise their income beyond their immediate crisis.</p> <p>Other hardship schemes provided by SCC include Council Tax Support, Council Tax hardship scheme, Discretionary Housing Payments, Local Assistance Scheme and Homelessness Prevention Grant.</p>	<p>Distribution by the community support helpline of HSF, Local Assistance Scheme, 3 Energy Support Schemes. Applicants of all schemes offered benefit maximisation support.</p> <p>Childrens social care are now able to directly access HSF where sec 17 is either not applicable or where the applicant meets eligibility for both schemes.</p> <p>We have 40 Trusted Assessors for the HSF, who can help people in hardship access this support. Each organisation is based in the heart of our communities, and many are also Welcome Places.</p>	<p>The One Route in Project has improved support by expanding eligibility, streamlining processes, and merging the Local Assistance Scheme crisis grants with the Household Support Fund.</p> <p>Value of awards that would have not been received if it wasn’t for One Route In: £126, 000.</p> <p>This has led to improved reputation with partners, better decision making based on need rather than budget, more options for</p>	<p>One application form under development which will bring application process for HSF and LAS crisis grants into one application. Once a proof of concept has been developed, we will look to roll the form out to the LAS independence grants.</p> <p>Currently under discussion to bring all LAS customer contacts into the CHS for crisis grants and independence grants.</p>

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				applicants, budget savings reinvested into independence grants, additional income for applicants, and reduced administrative work and travel time.	
		Holiday food vouchers for Free School Meals families.	These were funded via central Government Covid funding and then Household Support Fund. They have been provided since the start of the pandemic.	This is a very effective way of directing financial support to people who are struggling the most: vouchers are well understood and take-up is good. Approximately 33k families receive food vouchers during school holidays.	Some of the current HSF is funding holiday vouchers. Longer-term consideration is being given to approach if HSF is ended or reduced after 23/24.
		Support for Food banks and other schemes that are providing emergency help. Food ladders work to link people using food banks towards other 'rungs' on the ladder, including community pantries, social eating projects and income maximisation – working closely with food	South Yorkshire Community Foundation fund established with £20K donation from SCC. Fund distributed to community organisations during 2022. SCC Food access plan provided £40K in 2022 for Food Purchasing Fund for distribution to food banks. Food Access plan included £75,000	Food banks are facing increased demand alongside reduced donations. This funding will help them continue to provide emergency food. Demand and supply will continue to be monitored.	South Yorkshire Mayoral Combine Authority funding £150K in 2023 to support sustainable food provision: Up to £48K to support Bulk Food Purchasing for food banks. Approx £102K to support community pantry/affordable

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		banks and food bank users to enable community responses	Food bank / food relief project development fund and £25,000 for Voluntary Action Sheffield for supporting the development of a comprehensive network of food support across the city including more systematic data collection	Whilst this will provide some help it is unlikely to meet the demand for emergency food.	food club model hubs in partner organisations.
		Holiday Activities and Food programme https://sheffieldhealthyholidays.org/	Provides some free healthy food to families alongside activities – promoting these sessions to low income families.	Impacts collated elsewhere.	Running through 2023 academic year
		Increase take up of Free School Meals by using Housing Benefit/Council Tax Support data.	SCC Revenues & Benefits regularly shares data on Council Tax Support claimants with Free School Meals team to identify families who are eligible for FSM	Increased number of families on Free School Meals.	Continuation through 2023 and beyond.
		Funding for welfare rights and debt advice and other VCF organisations to ensure that people receive the financial support they are entitled to. Welfare rights and debt advice are crucial for people to know what they are entitled to and to challenge the system when it does not get it right (between 2018 and 2021, 7 out of 10 disability benefit appeals in the UK were successful).	SCC provides approx. £830,000 grant funding to Citizens Advice Sheffield, with an additional approx. £220,000 from service areas for particular support e.g. for housing, Adult Social Care, employment. As well as phone support, Citizens Advice are providing face-to-face advice accessible from many food banks. Triage process to better meet demand – directing towards self-help, Step Change or similar, and casework. Expanding Community Access Points (a simple	Citizens Advice Sheffield produce regular impact reports. Recognition that the demand for welfare and debt support is higher than supply. Central Government have reduced funding for debt advice.	Consideration of the scale of demand, particularly around increasing debt, and how we can respond as a city.

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			screen where you can see an advisor) in points across the city. Work with other VCS and public sector to train frontline staff and set up fast track referral pathways		
		Period poverty work, including work with Irise International – a charity that works globally and in South Yorkshire to tackle period poverty and stigma.	Communications to schools to encourage them to take up free Government period products scheme. Established links between Irise and S6 food store to get more period products to food banks. Initial work	This work is still in its early stages and isn't a core part of the Cost of Living response so impact is not known.	Sheffield Period and Menopause Charter is in early stages of development.
		Work that schools are doing to support families through cost-of-living crisis.	Many schools are providing of support to their parents and pupils, although links between schools and the wider cost of living response has been patchy.	Impact hasn't been centrally collated.	Work more closely with schools and learning providers. An increased focus on the impact on children and young people and how we are working with schools and youth services including mapping support, deep dives and analysing data on impacts for this group.
		Work to support people into employment support	Worked closely with DWP to support jobs fairs and provided training to DWP staff. Provided information about support into employment in our communications.	4 DWP events with 203 people supported	CoL Support Hub attending event with 60 employers, and Opportunity Sheffield events.
		Work to support people to stop smoking – this is particularly focused on people in deprived communities because of the	New Smoke Free Sheffield campaign launched in January 22 aims to help empower smokers to	Won LGC award.	Ongoing campaign.

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		higher prevalence of smoking and the impact on finances as well as health.	know they are "Strong enough to quit". Aimed particularly at lower-income groups.		
		Improve access to and knowledge of affordable credit and ethical financial products in the city	Sheffield Credit Union work to increase access to affordable credit https://sheffieldcreditunion.com/ . Can provide loans to new customers, even with poor credit rating. Pilot with Illegal Money Lending Team: if they turn someone down for a loan (because they wouldn't be able to afford to pay it back), SCU still pay their joining fee so they can keep in touch with them guide them towards financial inclusion. Training staff through GamCare to help recognise problem gambling and help with conversations.		
<i>Support to and from business</i>	Do what we can to ensure that emergency support is available when people are in financial crisis Co-ordinate support for the	Support provided to businesses who are struggling as a result of cost-of-living response.	A suite of communications and resources has been developed to support high street businesses feeling the impact of the rising Cost of Living, has been produced and delivered face to face on all high streets by the Business Information Officer Team and available online and promoted through the Business Sheffield mailshot. Close working relationship with business facing regulatory services	Supporting businesses to remain open where possible or to close safely where appropriate.	Ongoing resources are being developed and utilised on a daily basis between all teams. Shared with city business stakeholders including FSB, Sheffield Bid and Sheffield Chamber.

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	<p>people and communities that need it the most</p> <p>Put people experiencing the cost of living crisis at the heart of Sheffield’s approach to recovery and delivering clean, inclusive growth including supporting people to respond to rising fuel prices, while preparing the whole city for long-term trends</p>		<p>in particular environmental health to support businesses and developed a referral mechanism between teams.</p> <p>Business Sheffield is providing an action plan approach for businesses on high street who are close to closing but want assistance to remain open - where our team will visit businesses on a weekly basis to work through specific actions to help them remain open.</p>		
		<p>Support provided by businesses who want to be part of supporting communities through the cost-of-living response.</p>	<p>Sheffield Business Together, a business-led cross sector collaboration, has linked up businesses that want to be part of the cost-of-living response with charities and causes that need support, as well as providing details about the support they can provide to their employees.</p> <p>Sheffield Property Association held a cost-of-living event at Zest in association with Sheffield Business Together, Voluntary Action Sheffield and SCC to provide opportunities for their members to be part of the cost of living work.</p> <p>We have provided information on how businesses can support cost of</p>	<p>Sheffield Business Together publishes regular impact reports</p>	<p>Facilitate conversations to define a clear ask for businesses who want to offer support to communities for example to welcome places.</p> <p>Further communications to promote messages on how businesses can help with cost-of-living</p>

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			living included in our communications and webpages.		
Funding and Infrastructure	All objectives	Establish and resource an infrastructure to respond to the Cost-of-Living Crisis	<p>Cost of Living Support Hub established and confirmed for another year until 31/03/24.</p> <p>Established a programme and governance structure with workstream leads and reporting mechanisms. Allocation of £2.6m from Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF) funding over three years. This includes £850,000 funding for VCF orgs, managed by South Yorkshire Community Fund, who are distributing this via grants of up to £10k to support Welcome Places. In addition, £160k to Voluntary Action Sheffield to create a bid writer post to support all community organisations access funding opportunities and develop skills; £125k to Citizens Advice for a Volunteer Coordinator to train Welcome Places to access advice support; and £1.24m to establish Cost of Living Community Development Workers - 7 to be managed by SCC and 10 to be</p>	<p>The funding secured and established infrastructure has allowed us to deliver a wide-ranging response and to build on the learning from the covid-19 response.</p> <p>The SPF is providing the foundation for longer-term plans and models around building resilience in VCF sector to provide ongoing support</p>	<p>LAC funding: £400, 000 ringfenced for cost-of-living response.</p> <p>Advocate for funding models that incentivise collaborative and coordinated action on CoL/ Poverty.</p> <p>Seek funding mechanisms that provide stability and encourage sustained efforts to address poverty. Engage with national charities, trusts, and foundations to explore funding opportunities aligned with the local agenda.</p>

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Data and Intelligence			managed by VCFS, allocated by LAC areas		
	Provide a central place to gather information about the scale and nature of the crisis, especially how it is developing over time, in order to prioritise actions and to amplify personal stories	<p>Collation and analysis of data and intelligence to better understand the issues faced</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Up-to-date intelligence from partnership groups – strategic and operational - National data sources that is extrapolated down to local level 	A data dashboard has been developed to show the context, impacts and types of support being accessed. PDF export attached.	Used to give overview and better understanding of impacts and support available and bigger picture and to manage performance and monitor changes and themes over time to support decision making.	Explore how we can better use service data (SCC and elsewhere) to capture levels of financial difficulty and identify appropriate solutions. Using the insights from the dashboard to shape our response. HSF review data. Produce monthly dashboard updates for partners and identifying opportunities to use data to better support.
Responding as a landlord and creditor	Help people maximise their income further (including but not limited to benefits maximisation) Do what we can to ensure that emergency support is provided when	Support for SCC tenants. Tenants who are struggling to pay their rent are encouraged to contact Council Housing – support with income maximisation, debt and other help is available.	Frontline worker briefings provide information for staff as well as those they support. Information is available on Development Hub for staff. SCC have increased 3 financial support funds for 23-24. The Housing Revenue Account hardship fund was increased to £450k from £150k for 23/24, to help tenants with Cost-of-Living pressures.	Quarter 4 increase in rent arrears have not been as high as anticipated. There was an increase of £300k in year across tenancies however the forecast was 3 times that. There are a number of possible reasons for this. Support provided:	£4.1m HUG (Homes Upgrade Grant) funding secured for approx. 200 off-gas private homes across the city to receive energy improvement measures between Apr 23 & Mar 25. Review our approach as a creditor, including where someone is in debt to more than one part of the council,

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	<p>people are in financial crisis</p>		<p>Discretionary Housing Payments – the amount available in 22/23 was £743k but has been increased in 23/24 to £943k. This is available for all residents across the city, not just SCC tenants.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Yorkshire Water Support – SCC tenants received £1.39m in 22/23 on rent accounts, which supported any tenant who met their criteria (on benefits/ low income etc) and who had a weekly water charge over £8.43/week, i.e. reduced their charge down to this amount. In 23/24 Yorkshire Water have said this amount will be £7.00/week, so will support more customers. <p>Housing teams are using data on energy performance in our housing stock, and data on rent arrears to target advice and support to locations that are likely to see the most expensive heating costs.</p>	<p>Access to the Household Support Fund mentioned above.</p> <p>£1.8m of financial support directly to SCC rent accounts (detailed below)</p> <p>Credits to utility bills over the winter - £400 awarded to every household.</p> <p>Additional payments throughout the year to people on benefits/pensioners</p> <p>We also use a system that analyses accounts and highlights those at most risk of non-payment, ensuring we can provide early intervention and intensive support to those that need it most.</p> <p>It's hoped this targeted early intervention will support better outcomes for</p>	<p>or where they are struggling to afford Council Tax.</p>

<i>Workstream</i>	Objectives supported by workstream	Actions	What has been done?	What is the impact?	What next?
		SCC approach to debt. Corporate debt policy – where a household is in debt to more than one part of the council, there is an approach in development to ensure that SCC is not making their situation worse.	Policy has been drafted and is being engaged on.	residents in the long run.	Continue to progress this alongside wider review of our approach as a creditor, including where someone is in debt to more than one part of the council, or where they are struggling to afford Council Tax
<i>Responding as employers</i>	Help people maximise their income further (including but not limited to benefits maximisation)	Support for our staff (SCC and others) It is becoming increasingly difficult for front line workers to purchase fuel due to increased prices. We are hearing anecdotally that there is a concern about how they are going to carry out visits, some staff have started accessing foodbanks themselves	Cost of living help for employees intranet page Cost of living help for employees Sheffield City Council.		Recently completed a procurement process for new employee financial advice and wellbeing products and low-cost financial products for employees, which will be available soon.
<i>Responding to what matters to specific groups</i>	Co-ordinate support for the people and communities that need it the most Provide a central place to gather information	Support for, and work with, disadvantaged groups in the city, including diverse communities and people with disabilities Activity here is also reflected into workstreams above. Groups who are particularly affected by this crisis include (not comprehensive) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Private renters - People with disabilities - BAMER communities 	Cohort analysis as part of the Household Support Fund work. Partnership meetings with representatives from wide range of groups.	Our cohort analysis has enabled us to make recommendations in the accompanying Household Support Fund report about how we can best target and prioritise different groups.	An increased focus on the impact on children and young people and how we are working with schools and youth services including mapping support, deep dives and analysing data on impacts for this group. Continuing work engaging with communities to co-

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	about the scale and nature of the crisis, especially how it is developing over time, in order to prioritise actions and to amplify personal stories	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Working poor - Young people, single parents, 			design communications and information in formats that work for specific communities.
		Local community work to respond to the Cost-of-Living Crisis. Activity here is also built into workstreams above.	<p>Moved our Cost-of-Living Support Hub into our Communities Directorate to align it with our LAC teams.</p> <p>We have attended LAC meetings in the city to raise awareness of CoL and support available.</p>		Work in the area is built into next steps above.
		<p>Co-produce responses with people who are affected by the cost-of-living crisis</p> <p>Develop a reference group?</p> <p>Work with and co-design responses and develop insight feedback loops with organisations that work directly with people</p>	Groups such as Disability Sheffield and Faith Star are included in the Strategy Group.		Utilise Community processes, such as LAC's and poverty truth commission, to involve communities in decision-making around CoL.
		Poverty Truth Commission – initial conversations have been held in the city.	Steering Group created, partners engaged, partial funding secured		Poverty Truth Commission steering group seeking further funding with an aim to start setting up in 2023.

What's next and how does this fit with wider work?

This is a living document and the content is regularly updated. The plan will be flexible and iterative, to respond to the uncertain nature of the crisis, and will evolve in line with the input and recommendations of the Cost of Living Crisis Strategy Group.

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