

Meeting Executive
Portfolio Area Leader of the Council
Date 7 December 2022



COST OF LIVING CRISIS RESPONSE

KEY DECISION

Authors Ben Threadgold
Sally Norman

Contributor Strategic Leadership Team

Lead Officer Richard Protheroe | 2938

Contact Officer Ben Threadgold | 07593 555820

1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 To update Executive on the progress that Stevenage Borough Council and partners made in implementing the action plan agreed by Executive in October 2022 in response to the cost of living crisis in this country

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That the updates to the Action Plan, attached at Appendix A, are noted.
- 2.2 That the Council continues to work with key local partners, including through the Stevenage Together Partnership, to develop a co-ordinated response across agencies to support residents, businesses and community groups
- 2.3 That further cost of living progress updates will be reported as part of the quarterly Corporate Performance and Budget Monitoring Reports. The next of these, for Quarter 3 of 2022/23, will be in March 2023.

- 2.4 That Executive notes that the potential for reduced income from fee-based services and people struggling to pay council tax and/or rent, coupled with increased demand for services and higher costs, could significantly impact on the Council's short and medium-term finances. This will continue to be closely monitored and reported to Executive as part of the Medium-Term Financial Strategy and budget setting process.

3 INTRODUCTION

- 3.1 As reported to Executive in October 2022, it is widely recognised and accepted that the United Kingdom is currently facing a cost of living crisis that is directly impacting all households and businesses to some extent.
- 3.2 The crisis is being driven by a number of factors, including (but not limited to) the cost of energy, food, fuel and other goods; the war in Ukraine and sanctions on Russia; highest levels of inflation for 40 years and rising interest rates; and ongoing residual impact from the Covid-19 pandemic and Brexit. For businesses, other factors are also impacting such as increased supplier and material costs, challenges in recruiting and retaining staff, and transport costs.
- 3.3 It is also anticipated that the crisis will impact more significantly on the poorest and most vulnerable people in the country, including the lowest paid, single parents, people with disabilities and families with three or more children.
- 3.4 Executive approved a draft Action Plan for Stevenage at its meeting in October. This plan set out how the Council and its partners would continue to respond to the cost of living crisis, and mitigate the potential impacts on residents, businesses, council employees and Council finances as much as possible.
- 3.5 This report sets out the most significant announcements and changes since the previous report in October, as well as progress in implementing the actions agreed at that meeting.
- 3.6 It is important to recognise that the Council alone cannot address or mitigate the potential impacts and is already working with partners to develop an understanding of the local situation and appropriate actions in response. This will continue throughout the crisis, in keeping with its commitments as a Co-operative Council.

4 AUTUMN BUDGET STATEMENT

- 4.1 The Chancellor presented an Autumn Budget Statement to Parliament on 17 November 2022. The statement was intended to provide some certainty for households, businesses and the financial markets are a turbulent period, and set out the support that would be available as well as how this support would be funded.
- 4.2 The Budget Statement was wide ranging, with the elements of most relevance to residents, businesses and the Council including:

Cost of Living

- Benefits to rise in line with inflation figure from September (10.1%)

- Pensions also to rise by 10.1% from April, sticking to the “triple lock” commitment
- National Living Wage for over-23’s to increase from £9.50/hour to £10.42 from April
- Targeted support for Cost of Living with additional payments of:
 - £900 for those on means-tested benefits
 - £300 to pensioner households
 - £150 to those on disability benefits
- Help for households through Energy Price Guarantee scheme will be extended for 12 months from April, but be less generous – the average household bill will rise to £3,000 per annum, up from £2,000 but lower than predicted £3,700 without Government help
- Freezing tax allowances and thresholds until 2028 (extended from 2026) so more people will pay higher levels of tax sooner – tax personal allowance, higher rate threshold, inheritance tax thresholds all stay the same, highest rate tax threshold reduced from £150k to £125k
- Commitment to people raising their income, with support for over 600k people on Universal Credit to meet with a work coach to help increase their hours and/or earnings
- Rent rises in the social rented sector capped at 7%

Energy / Environment

- Increased windfall tax on energy companies from 25% to 35%, extended to March 2028.
- Will also be a 40% tax on profits of older renewable and nuclear electricity generation
- Reaffirmed Government commitment to climate change measures, including a 68% reduction in emissions by 2030
- Will also double investment in energy efficiency of homes and businesses by £6bn from 2025
- Electric vehicles will no longer be exempt from road tax from April 2025.

Business

- Almost £14bn reduction on business rates, benefiting about 700k businesses nationally
- From 1 April 2023, business rate bills in England will be updated to reflect changes in property values since the last revaluation in 2017. A package of support worth £13.6 billion over the next 5 years will support businesses as they transition to their new bills
- Employment Allowance threshold retained at £5k
- 40% of all firms will pay no national insurance contributions at all
- Investment Zones will be kept focused in “left behind areas” to build growth clusters, with more detail to be announced in the Spring Budget
- Tariffs will be cut to support business supply chains

Local Government

- Likely to see a spending squeeze as a result of all Government departments being asked to reduce costs, with the exception of health
 - Departmental spending commitments in 2021 spending round will be kept, and will grow at 1% per annum in the 3 years that follow
 - Extra £2.3bn per year for education in 2023/24 and 2024/25
 - £1bn next year and £1.7bn the year after for social care, funded by savings from delaying reforms
 - £3.3bn extra for NHS, but expectation of finding efficiency savings from improved ways of working and less waste – but not impacting frontline
 - Councils will be able to raise Council Tax by up to 3% without the need for a referendum, plus an additional up to 2% social care levy for those councils providing social care (Hertfordshire County Council in this county).
- 4.3 The full impact of these announcements is currently being worked through by Officers, including the impact on the Medium Term Financial Strategy and budget setting for 2023/4 onwards. Executive will be kept informed of the outcome of this modelling as the impact becomes clearer.
- 4.4 At a headline level, the additional support for residents and businesses is very welcome, but is unlikely to fully mitigate the pressures that are being faced. The country has now entered a recession that is expected to last for some time, and there are predictions that unemployment is likely to rise in 2023 at the same time that living standards are predicted to fall by 7% over the next 2 years.
- 4.5 The implementation of changes to business rates will be closely monitored to track the impact on local businesses. It is hoped that the transitional funding announced will mean any reductions will be made in full, whilst increases will be staggered to lessen the immediate impact and to allow businesses to adjust. It is also important that there is an explicit commitment that local authorities will be fully compensated for the loss of income as a result of all business rates measures announced in the Autumn Statement and will receive new burdens funding for administrative and IT costs incurred in implementing them.
- 4.6 From a council perspective, the greater flexibility to raise council tax by 3%, raising the cap on social housing rent to 7% and positive news about income from business rates is also welcome, but has to be considered alongside the impact this will have on residents and businesses. As a stock-holding
- 4.7 Further announcements will come in the Local Government Finance Settlement anticipated to be announced later in December and confirmed in February 2023, but overall the measures in the Autumn Statement will not significantly relieve the financial pressures local government is experiencing. The District Councils Network predict district councils will face a total collective budget shortfall of over £900m across 2022-23 and 2023-24, due to rising inflation, rising demand and pay pressures
- 4.8 As a result, the Council will continue to face difficult decisions how best to continue to help local residents and businesses with cost-of-living pressures whilst also setting a balanced budget.

5 LOCAL INTELLIGENCE

- 5.1 The Council continues to monitor the impact of the cost of living crisis locally, and share this information with partners. In particular, a cost of living dashboard has been developed jointly with Citizen's Advice Stevenage, and also including information from other partners such as Mind in Mid-Herts as well as nationally available data.
- 5.2 In addition to the overall impact mentioned above and reported nationally, four key trends are emerging from the data:
- **Tenant rent arrears** has increased by 13.32% since Quarter 1 of 2022/23, with 71% of this arrears attributable to tenants in receipt of welfare benefits (Universal Credit and Housing Benefit). There is also an increase in the numbers of complex cases, with people seeing a change in financial circumstances, multiple debts, need for urgent support, and associated health and wellbeing concerns. This also makes people more susceptible to scams and fraud, with targeted advice and support needed.
 - **Domestic abuse referrals** to SADA and the NO More Service have also seen a significant increase, up 88% compared to 12 months ago. This trend is likely to reflect heightened pressures that households are facing, and mirrors similar increases during the Covid-19 pandemic and previous economic downturn in 2008.
 - **Discretionary Housing Payment requests** are increasing significantly with almost 300 received between April and September this year. This comes at the same time as the funding the Council receives has reduced by almost 30% and the Government has raised the threshold for support. This means that more tenants are being refused support (11% in Quarter 1), and those that are successful are getting less money.
 - The number of **Council Tax Support Scheme claimants** has reduced by almost 10% compared to 2021/22, at the same time as Citizens Advice are seeing an increasing number of clients with council tax arrears (35% increase comparing August 2021 to August 2022). Targeted communications to increase awareness of the support available are underway.
- 5.3 This information is being used to inform partners, and to help shape further targeted support and action in response.

6 PROGRESS IN IMPLEMENTING THE ACTION PLAN

- 6.1 As mentioned previously, the Council is focusing on the impact of the cost of living crisis on local residents, businesses and community groups, Council employees and the Council's finances.
- 6.2 The Council is also concentrating on a number of key themes that the Council is able to directly influence:
- Understanding the various impacts of the crisis, to enable targeted support to be prioritised where needed the most and to help track the impact of any actions and interventions
 - Co-ordinating Government support to reach those that need it

- Providing information, support and advice, including promoting and signposting to the most appropriate sources
 - Maintaining good health, including physical, mental and community wellbeing such as volunteering
 - Access to food and nutrition, including community larders, food banks, gardens, healthy eating and cooking advice and support
 - Housing, including costs, repairs and improvements, retrofitting and decarbonisation
 - Working in partnership to co-ordinate Council activities, maximise their impact and to target support in localities / to the most in need
- 6.3 An update showing progress against the previously agreed action plan is attached as Appendix A.
- 6.4 Particular highlights worth drawing attention to include:

Residents

- The Cost of Living Hub on the website continues to be reviewed and updated as more relevant information is released locally and nationally. The layout of the site has been amended to make it easier to navigate.
- Leaflets about the support available have been developed jointly with Citizen's Advice Stevenage and are being distributed by the Council Income Team.
- The Council is now part of the Money Advisor Network to broaden offer and ability to refer people for support, including training for Income Officers, referral routes and access for staff to complement existing Employee Assistance offering
- The Stevenage Warm Spaces Network launched in November, promoting opportunities in council-owned buildings across the town as well as those offered by voluntary and public sector partners. The focus is having Warm Spaces as close to people's homes as possible, that there is a good spread throughout the week and across the town, and there is the option of meaningful activities and advice as well as some spaces that are simply available for people to sit and spend time. The scheme is being promoted both online and via community noticeboards, direct mail, the Chronicle magazine and through community partners, recognising the target audience may not use our website. The Stevenage scheme is aligned with the Herts County Council offer, unlocking potential support and funding as well as wider promotion through the online directory.
- Cost of Living Crisis event hosted by Reed in Partnership at Argyle Way on 18 October, supported by the Council's No More Service and SADA. This was aimed at their clients, but was also open more widely.
- The Council also supported a mental health and wellbeing event "Creating a resilient mind-set and face every challenge" on 15 November in partnership with ActionCoach.

Businesses

- Businesses are being signposted to the Herts Growth Board online hub as a key source of support and advice.
- The Hertfordshire Growth Hub has launched a 'Cost of Living Business Survey', which SBC is helping to raise awareness of and will benefit from the findings and feedback. The Hub recognises that local businesses and

employers are also facing similar challenges to those of their staff, with rising costs and other inflationary pressures.

- All commercial tenants are being proactively contacted and individual circumstances reviewed where appropriate

Council Employees

- A dedicated online hub for staff is now live and being regularly updated, including financial advice and signposting to the Council's Employee Assistance Programme should people want to access it. This content has been shared with other local authorities who are interested in replicating it.
- The national pay award was agreed and is now being implemented as swiftly as possible for all staff. It will be backdated to April.

Council Finances

- The Council continues to model the adverse impact of the crisis on council finances, and in particular rising inflation and energy costs, the higher than anticipated pay award for staff, reductions in income including rent arrears and council tax as well as parking (for example), and the impact on tenants and leaseholders.
- This modelling links to reviews of the MTFs, Housing Revenue Account and budget setting conversations for 2023/24, and reflects announcements as part of the Autumn Budget statement on 17 November.
- Engagement with existing suppliers is ongoing to understand current and predicted situation. The pipeline of upcoming contracts is also being reviewed to understand where potential increases and challenges in procuring competitive suppliers may come, and where increases to budget may be needed
- Communications to residents are underway setting out the impact of current financial situation on the Council and the potential impact on council tax

Governance, collaboration and oversight

- The Executive Member Working Group and Officer Working Group continue to meet regularly and oversee the response to the crisis.
- All Councillors have been briefed in writing, about the support that is available to them and to residents and businesses, and an all-Member Briefing on 7 November was well attended.
- Two meetings of the Stevenage Together Partnership have taken place to share intelligence and planned actions. Examples of partnership working include promoting the social value benefits to local businesses of supporting the warm spaces scheme, development of "full financial MOT's" for residents and reinvigorating healthy eating and cooking programmes run by Stevenage FC Football Foundation and Step 2 Skills.
- A dashboard has been developed and is being regularly updated and reviewed by the Welfare Reform Group and Cost of Living Officer Working Group. This includes input and data from partners including Citizen's Advice and has already helped to identify key trends such as increases in rent arrears, domestic abuse referrals and requests for

Discretionary Housing Payments as well as reductions in council tax collection and requests for Council Tax Support.

7 FURTHER ACTIONS AND NEXT STEPS

- 7.1 The Environment and Economy Select Committee is scoping a review into the cost of living crisis. Whilst appreciating the Committee's desire to understand the impact of the crisis locally, Officers are supporting the scoping to ensure it is mindful of the exceptional challenges and pressures being faced by the Council, the fact the crisis is evolving and developing, and the capacity needed to report in detail to multiple bodies. To avoid duplicating the focus of the existing Executive Member and Officer Working Groups and the Stevenage Together Partnership, it is proposed that information and updates will also be shared with the Chair of the Environment and Economy Select Committee.

8 NEXT STEPS

- 8.1 The ongoing implementation of the action plan will continue to be overseen by the Executive Member Working Group, supported by the Officer Working Group.
- 8.2 The ongoing response will be kept under close review, and the approach adapted where appropriate to reflect changing circumstances and learning from local, regional and national interventions if/when alternative actions are considered to be more effective.
- 8.3 The approach will also be closely monitored to align with any further relevant announcements from Government and other sources, and any funding that is made available.
- 8.4 Further cost of living progress updates will be reported as part of the quarterly Corporate Performance and Budget Monitoring Reports. The next of these, for Quarter 3 of 2022/23, will be in March 2023.
- 8.5 The Stevenage Together Partnership will continue to coordinate joint responses to the cost of living crisis and is scheduled to meet again early in 2023.

9 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDED COURSE OF ACTION AND OTHER OPTIONS

- 9.1 The Leader, Executive Members and Senior Leadership Team have all been consulted about and engaged in the ongoing response to the cost of living crisis, as have partners through the Stevenage Together Partnership.
- 9.2 The focus is on areas the Council can directly influence that will have a positive impact in mitigating the impact of the crisis on local residents, businesses and community groups, Council employees and the Council's finances.
- 9.3 Executive could choose to take a different approach to helping to mitigate the impacts, but it is felt that the current proposals and governance arrangements will be the most effective given their initial focus is based on local evidence, flexibility, oversight and commitment to working with others.

10 IMPLICATIONS

10.1 Financial Implications

- 10.1.1 The adverse financial implications highlighted in this report will be further developed and monitored as part of the financial modelling linked to the MTFS and budget setting for 2023/24.
- 10.1.2 Officers responsible for delivering the actions set out within this report continue to identify and consider any resulting financial implications.
- 10.1.3 The cost of living crisis is already impacting directly on Council finances and will continue to do so. In addition to increasing costs for fuel, energy and other materials, the Council is likely to see an increase in demand for many services at the same time as a reduction in income from fee-based services and people struggling to pay council tax and rent. This will be closely monitored and could lead to challenging decisions needing to be taken about the Medium Term Financial Strategy in due course.

10.2 Legal Implications

- 10.2.1 There are no direct legal implications from the recommendations contained in this report. However, officers responsible for delivering the activity set out within this report will need to identify and consider any resulting legal implications in consultation with the Borough Solicitor.

10.3 Equalities and Diversity Implications

- 10.3.1 There are no direct equality, diversity and inclusion implications arising from this report, although it is possible that the impacts of the cost of living crisis will be greater for people on lower incomes, with disabilities, and with caring responsibilities so actions will prioritise support for the most vulnerable where possible.
- 10.3.2 Where necessary, Equality Impact Assessments will be completed for programmes, projects and service changes identified to ensure any negative, differential impacts are mitigated where possible.

10.4 Risk Implications

- 10.4.1 There are no direct significant risks to the Council in agreeing the recommendation(s). However, the potential impacts of the cost of living crisis are already being monitored as part of the Strategic Risk Register and officers responsible for delivering the actions set out within this report will need to consider any risk implications that arise.
- 10.4.2 The Council has an embedded approach to risk management that mitigates any adverse effect on delivery of the Council's objectives and internal control processes and also provides good governance assurance.

10.5 Other Corporate implications

10.5.1 Implementing the priorities and improvement activity outlined in this report may impact on the development of future policy or procedure, and require the realignment of resources to deliver specific actions.

11 BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

None.

12 APPENDICES

- Appendix A: Cost of Living Action Plan Progress Update November 2022.

Appendix A –Cost of Living Action Plan Progress Update November 2022

Residents			
Action	Timescale	Owner	Update November 2022
Continue to develop and update the online Cost of Living information hub in the Council website, covering Council support and signposting to other support, including Government and local grants, advice about avoiding scams, and support with household costs such as school uniforms	December 2022	Corporate Policy	<p>Website continues to be reviewed and updated as more relevant information is released locally and nationally</p> <p>Layout of site has been amended to make it easier to navigate</p> <p>Leaflets about the support available have been developed jointly with Citizen’s Advice Stevenage and are being distributed by the Council Income Team.</p> <p>Specific advice on avoiding scams has been shared on social media, including links to the Herts County Council scheme on fraud awareness. Information will also be included with rent notification letters in early 2023</p>
Work with partners including Citizen’s Advice and the Money Advice Unit to offer residents a comprehensive advice and support service – a “full financial MOT” looking at short-term and longer-term changes that will improve their financial resilience	November 2022	Corporate Policy / Co-operative Neighbourhoods	<p>Continue to develop and promote the range of support available and offering “full financial MOT’s” as part of any contact with clients referred for welfare support</p> <p>The Council is now part of the Money Advisor Network to broaden offer and ability to refer people for support, including training for Income Officers, referral routes and access for staff to complement existing Employee Assistance offering</p>

<p>Work with partners to develop a Warm Spaces scheme, utilising public, community and other buildings to offer comfort during the winter months, alongside information, advice and other social opportunities to support people</p>	<p>November 2022</p>	<p>Cooperative Neighbourhoods</p>	<p>Stevenage Warm Spaces Network launched in November, promoting opportunities in council-owned buildings across the town as well as those offered by voluntary and public sector partners. The scheme is being promoted both online and via community noticeboards, direct mail, the Chronicle magazine and through community partners.</p> <p>The Stevenage scheme is aligned with the Herts County Council offer, unlocking potential support and funding as well as wider promotion through the online directory</p>
<p>Advice to help people with cooking on a budget, including links to Step to Skills to develop learning opportunities</p>	<p>December 2022</p>	<p>Co-operative Neighbourhoods</p>	<p>Step to Skills are actively exploring the option to run courses locally</p> <p>Stevenage FC Foundation are also looking to provide more information on their cooking classes as part of the healthy hub programme of work, and link to further funding opportunities to improve sustainability</p>
<p>Promote availability of local employment opportunities, and skills and training courses (including funding available to support access) to help raise awareness and confidence for people to increase income and improve their financial wellbeing</p>	<p>January 2023</p>	<p>Planning and Regulation / Communications and Marketing</p>	<p>Cost of Living Crisis event hosted by Reed in Partnership at Argyle Way on 18th October, supported by SBC No More Service and SADA. This was aimed at their clients, but also open more widely.</p> <p>The Council also supported a mental health and wellbeing event – “Create a resilient mind-set and face every challenge” event on 15 November in partnership with ActionCoach.</p> <p>Further events are planned for early 2023</p>

Businesses and Community Groups			
Action	Timescale	Owner	Update November 2022
Develop and/or signpost to existing online information and support hub (such as the Herts Growth Board), to increase awareness of the support, funding and advice available	November 2022	Planning and Regulation	Businesses are being signposted to the Herts Growth Board online hub as a key source of support and advice which is constantly being reviewed and updated
Utilise existing relationships and networks to reach out to local businesses and community groups to understand what support they need, and what interventions from the Council and partners would be most beneficial in supporting them	December 2022	Planning and Regulation	The Hertfordshire Growth Hub has launched a 'Cost of Living Business Survey' to help understand and address the issues businesses are currently facing and plan for future support requirements. The Council is helping to raise awareness of the survey and will benefit from the findings and feedback, which will also be used to lobby BEIS for further support for businesses
Contact businesses that are Council tenants to offer support and to promote information, advice and other measures to help those in financial difficulty	December 2022	Estates and Facilities	All council tenants are being proactively contacted and individual circumstances reviewed where appropriate The impact of reductions in business rates announced in the Autumn Budget Statement is also being reviewed

Council Employees			
Action	Timescale	Owner	Update November 2022
Develop an online information and support hub promoting the internal and external information, advice, support available to employees	November 2022	HR	Online hub for staff is now live and being regularly updated. This content has been shared with other local authorities who are interested in replicating it.
Provide financial advice and support about short term loans, avoiding scams and so on given the marked increase in both that has been reported nationally amongst public sector employees	November 2022	HR	Internal communication with staff is underway to raise awareness of issues and the support available should they need it, and an all-staff briefing is planned to further explain this The Employee Assistance Programme and Good Shape are providing metrics on staff usage. Good Shape is also signposting staff to financial support services.
Implement the outcome of the national pay review, once confirmed following consultation with the Unions	January 2023	HR	The national pay award was agreed by 2 of the 3 unions, and is now being implemented. It will be backdated to April.
Promote and role-model the Council's flexible working policies, including recognising that more employees living locally may choose to come into the office to reduce heating costs at home (for example)	November 2022	HR	This is linked to the online information hub for staff, and reminders to managers of the support available for employees.

Council Finances			
Action	Timescale	Owner	Update November 2022
Modelling impact of inflation and other rising costs on Council budgets, in year and for 2023/24	January 2023	Finance	<p>Modelling work continues, linked to reviews of the MTFs, HRA and budget setting conversations for 2023/24. This reflects announcements as part of the Autumn Budget statement on 17 November, including raising the Council Tax threshold, extending the energy price guarantee, and setting the social rent cap limit at 7%.</p> <p>Communications to residents are underway setting out the impact of current financial situation on the Council and the potential impact on council tax</p>
Engaging with suppliers to understand any likely price increases and/or issues with availability of goods and services as a result of increased cost and pressures for them	December 2022	Corporate Procurement	Engagement with existing suppliers is ongoing to understand current and predicted situation. The pipeline of upcoming contracts is also being reviewed to understand where potential increases and challenges in procuring competitive suppliers may come, and where increases to budget may be needed
Develop and implement decarbonisation schemes to reduce Council and tenant costs. This will include a bid to Round 2.1 of the Government's Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund targeting properties with a EPC D rating or below.	November 2022	Housing and Investment	This was considered and approved by Executive on 12/10/2022, and work on the bid is ongoing.

<p>Modelling the impact of energy increases in the charges to tenants and leaseholders, to consider how best to support people with managing costs</p>	<p>December 2022</p>	<p>Finance</p>	<p>Modelling work continues, linked to reviews of the MTFs, HRA and budget setting conversations for 2023/24</p> <p>600+ tenants will not be covered by district heating scheme and won't get an energy rebate. Financial pressures are likely to lead to more communities wanting help, more homeless presentations, impact on our fees and charges e.g. service charges.</p> <p>Details of how the latest energy payments to residents and businesses will be paid through the recently announced Energy Bills Support Scheme and alternative funding support for those who do not have a domestic electricity meter or a direct relationship with an energy supplier are also awaited, and if required to be distributed by the Council this will be done as swiftly as possible</p>
<p>Governance, collaboration and oversight</p>			
<p>Action</p>	<p>Timescale</p>	<p>Owner</p>	<p>Update November 2022</p>
<p>Continue to work through the Stevenage Together Partnership to share learning and best practice and to co-ordinate activity where appropriate</p>	<p>January 2023</p>	<p>Corporate Policy</p>	<p>Two meetings of the Stevenage Together Partnership have focused on the cost of living crisis, and shared detail of the evidence organisations are gathering about the impact locally.</p> <p>Examples of partnership working include promoting the social value benefits to local businesses of supporting the warm spaces scheme, development of "full financial MOT's" for residents and reinvigorating</p>

			<p>healthy eating and cooking programmes run by Stevenage FC Football Foundation and Step 2 Skills.</p> <p>The next Stevenage Together Meeting is planned for January 2023. All partners have been asked to continue sharing issues they are identifying, and actions they are taking in response to the crisis.</p>
Continue to work with the County and district and borough councils in Hertfordshire to share learning and best practice and to co-ordinate activity where appropriate	January 2023	Corporate Policy	Continue to link with others. Primary link currently is to the countywide Warmer Spaces work being led by Herts County Council, and the online directory and funding schemes in partnership with Herts Community Foundation and Communities 1 st .
Develop local dashboard to track impact, analyse outcomes of any interventions, and to inform targeted action, linked to the Welfare Reform Group and Citizen's Advice	November 2022	Corporate Policy	<p>Dashboard has been developed and is being regularly updated and reviewed by the Welfare Reform Group and Cost of Living Officer Working Group. It includes input and data from partners including Citizen's Advice and is also being aligned with the countywide dashboard being developed by Herts County Council</p> <p>Key trends are included within report to Executive in December, and were shared with Stevenage Together Partnership in November.</p>
Further develop the use of the Social Value Portal to divert funding from Council contractors to local skills development and key local investment priorities	March 2023	Co-operative Neighbourhoods	This work is currently being scoped.