
ANTI-POVERTY STRATEGY – UPDATE ON COST OF LIVING RESPONSE

Report by Director, Resilient Communities

SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL

29 June 2023

1 PURPOSE AND SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report provides an update in relation to the £1.2m financial support package that was released from Council reserves to provide support to communities during 2022/23.**
- 1.2 At Council on 25 August 2022, it was agreed to approve the creation of a short term multi-agency Cost of Living Crisis Strategic Group and an Operational Officers Group in order to provide an enhanced response to the exceptional autumn and winter pressures our communities were facing.
- 1.3 These groups have reported into the Anti-Poverty Members Reference Group and the Community Planning Partnership, and have also taken into account local requirements and response across each of our five localities.
- 1.4 An update is also provided for the allocation of balances in relation to the Financial Hardship Fund.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 I recommend that Council:

- (a) Notes the Cost of Living spend to date as detailed in section 4 of this report, and the balances being carried forward to 2023/24:**
- (b) Notes the Financial Hardship Fund spend to date as detailed in section 4 of this report, and the balances being carried forward to 2023/24: and**
- (c) Agrees that the Director of Resilient Communities, in consultation with the Anti-Poverty Members Reference Group, consider any further action that is required and provides a further report to Council if there are any further financial implications.**

3 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 At the Scottish Borders Council meeting on 25 August 2022, a £1.2m underspend from 2021/22 outturn reserves was released to provide support to communities during 2022/23.
 - 3.2 It was agreed to allocate £585k of the £1.2m to allow immediate dispersion of financial support as detailed in paragraph 4.1.
 - 3.3 Council also agreed to delegate authority to the Director of Resilient Communities in consultation with the members of the Anti-Poverty Members Reference Group, to allocate the remaining £615k as required.
 - 3.4 Council also agreed to establish a multi-agency Anti-Poverty Strategic Group and an Operational Officers Group to respond to the global cost of living crisis. The Groups consult and receive information, data and real life experiences from the Financial Hardship Officers Group, Financial Inclusion Practitioners Group, Poverty Data Group, the Food Conversations Group and any other appropriate mechanisms that are available.
 - 3.5 The creation of these groups has enabled a focussed, corporate and partnership response to further support those in need, and to disperse funding in a timely, efficient and effective way, and to support the delivery of actions within the Anti-Poverty Strategy Action Plan and the Child Poverty Action Plan.
 - 3.6 A communications plan was also created to provide a comprehensive campaign that provided general information, and a support directory for both Challenge Poverty Week in October 2022 and the Council's website: [Financial support and advice | Cost of Living Crisis support | Scottish Borders Council \(scotborders.gov.uk\)](https://www.scotborders.gov.uk)
 - 3.7 The longer term ongoing issue of poverty across the Scottish Borders continues to be addressed by the Scottish Borders Anti-Poverty Strategy and Action Plan, with progress being reported to the Anti-Poverty Members Reference Group, and supported by both the Cost of Living Strategic Group and Cost of Living Operational Group.
 - 3.8 In June 2022, the Community Planning Strategic Board approved four themes for the 2022/23 CPP Work Plan (interim Community Plan):
 1. Theme 1 – enough money to live on
 2. Theme 2 – access to work, learning and training
 3. Theme 3 – enjoying good health and wellbeing
 4. Theme 4 – a good place to grow up, live and enjoy a full life
- Both the Cost of Living Support Package, and the delivery of the actions within the Ant-Poverty Action Plan make a significant contribution to the outcomes contained within each theme.
- 3.9 In addition to the £1.2m cost of living support, other financial support includes the Financial Hardship Fund. Details of this was reported to the Council's Executive Committee on 9 February 2021 and 16 November 2021.

A balance of £190k was administered through the Anti-Poverty Strategic Group.

4 ALLOCATION OF £1.2m COST OF LIVING SUPPORT FUND

4.1 An immediate allocation of £585k was agreed by Council on 25 August 2022, which enabled a range of support to be put in place quickly. This included:

£150k	Extending existing arrangements with organisations such as CAB, Changeworks etc., to provide additional resources to assist with referrals, energy advice, money advice, signposting, and budgeting
£235k	Warm clothing payment of £100 to each child entitled to either Free School Meals or Clothing Grants - an initial 2,350 children benefitted
£50k	Top up Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) funding
£100k	Further top up of Scottish Welfare Fund (SWF) funding
£50k	Additional resources to be used to support & process increased take up of benefits

4.2 Since August 2022, proposals for the remaining £615k have been considered and approved by the Cost of Living Strategic Board as follows:

£100k	Expansion of the Inclusion Fund
£22k	Support Warm Spaces across the Scottish Borders: Warm spaces Cost of Living Crisis support Scottish Borders Council (scotborders.gov.uk)
£15k	Energy training and food support
£96k	Warm & Well, Youth Work Collaborative
£84k	Borders Housing Network, extension of Warm & Well Project, and provision of an additional resource to advise tenants
£13k	Live Borders, financial support to ClubSport members in relation to energy
£60k	Breakfast Club pilot for schools within highest SIMD areas
£35k	Additional funding to support increased take up of £100 Warm Clothing Grant – a further 345 children benefitted
£86k	Third Sector Interface & Live Borders, £50k for energy support, £36k for club membership, equipment and clothing support for sports clubs and organisations
£30k	Financial Inclusion Assistant role in Employability Service
£7.5k	Warm Spaces – Reaching You. A CAB proposal to provide outreach services.

4.3 A balance of **£66,591** is available for further allocation during 2023/24.

4.4 Evaluation of the impact of these supports is underway and references are made to these in the Anti-Poverty Progress Report which is also presented to this Council meeting. Specific examples include:

- a) The Warm and Well Fund was launched to support voluntary, community and charity organisations to provide warm spaces. In Berwickshire, over 200 warm space sessions were delivered between November 2022 and March 2023, with over 4,000 people attending. In Cheviot, St. Boswells Village Hall developed 'Warm-up Wednesdays'. These sessions ran for 14 weeks and supported over 200 members of the community.
- b) The Warm & Well: Youth Work Collaborative awarded grants to 25 YouthBorders member organisations to deliver additional youth work activities or enhance provision to keep young people warm and well over winter 2022. This funding was for young people and families experiencing financial hardship, poverty or deprivation and it provided a dignified approach to the impact of the increased cost of living on young people in their communities. A total of 1,488 young people directly benefitted from this funding, there were 280 additional youth work sessions and 430 households were signposted to further advice and support. 182 care packs of food, blankets and warm or waterproof clothing were also distributed.
- c) £60k was awarded for Breakfast Clubs to 20 schools/community groups, (3 in Berwickshire, 4 in Cheviot, 9 in Eildon, 3 in Teviot & Liddesdale, and 1 in Tweeddale). Funding is being used to provide free breakfast for everyone with the aim of maximising attendance in school, providing a nutritional breakfast and working towards providing an equitable offer across the Scottish Borders. We will continue to evaluate the impact, early feedback from one school reported that lateness has decreased, the choice of breakfast is positive, children are more alert and around 25% of the school are attending.

4.5 In relation to the Financial Hardship Fund the following allocations have been made from the £190k balance.

Access to Food	
£76,665	Cyrenians, to provide community cook clubs in Selkirk, Walkerburn, Jedburgh and Galashiels
£20,890	Low and Slow Projects, available in Galashiels, Eyemouth, Duns, Peebles, Hawick and Newcastleton
£3,000	FareShare Membership across the Borders
£38,830	Eildon Housing, support for Borders FareShare Hub
£9,000	Eildon Housing, further support for Borders FareShare Hub

Supermarket Gift Cards	
£9,000	Violence Against Women Service (VAW)
£2,400	Early Years Team
£9,000	Further allocation to VAW
£5,500	Alcohol and Drugs Partnership

4.6 This leaves a balance of **£15,715** for further allocation during 2023/24.

4.7 Examples of how this funding has benefitted residents of the Scottish Borders include:

- a) 60 participants have taken part in the Low and Slow programme and 65 slow cookers have been distributed

- b) The Eildon Housing Community FoodHub works in partnership to distribute donations across the Borders to address the growing need for access to food for individuals, families and their pets.

4.8 The Cost of Living Strategic Group and the Anti-Poverty Members Reference Group continue to look at levels of demand and options to provide further support. If the Council should consider any further financial support, a report will come forward on the implications.

5 IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Financial

In response to the cost of living crisis, the Council released an underspend from reserves to provide £1.2m support to communities during 2022/23. A balance of £84,488 was carried forward into 2023/24. There is also an outstanding balance of £15,715 from the Financial Hardship Fund. The multi-agency Strategic Group and the Anti-Poverty Members Reference Group will continue to meet to disperse this balance appropriately. Other earmarked balances from 2022/23 will increase budgets available for 2023/24 for the Scottish Welfare Fund, Inclusion Fund and Discretionary Housing Payments. Together with Scottish Government cost of living payments and other grant offers e.g. Child poverty funding, these budgets will continue to support a range of measures to provide additional resources where required to address the continuing cost of living issues.

5.2 Risk and Mitigations

The dispersal of £1.2m has helped to mitigate hardship for Scottish Borders residents. The agreement to release these funds in August 2022 has enabled the multi-agency Strategic Group and the Anti-Poverty Members Reference Group to make a difference to those in need throughout the cost of living crisis. Agreement to carry forward balances will ensure that this response can continue, and along with national payments, will continue to help those most in need of support.

5.3 Integrated Impact Assessment

An integrated impact assessment has been carried out for this report and is shown in Appendix 1. There are no specific implications.

5.4 Sustainable Development Goals

In considering each of the UN Sustainable Development Goals, the following may be considered to make a difference:

- a) **No Poverty**: This report details the dispersion of cost of living funds. Residents of the Scottish Borders have benefitted as a result. This has made a contribution to ending poverty in all its forms.
- b) **Zero Hunger**: Strategic and local action contributing to the improvement of food insecurity and nutrition is reported as part of the dispersal of funds, driven by the needs of the community.

- c) **Good Health and Wellbeing:** The warm and well initiatives detailed in this report contribute to ensuring healthy lives and promoting wellbeing for all. This includes work undertaken by SBC, Live Borders, Youth Borders and the Third Sector.
- d) **Affordable and Clean Energy:** Work with partnerships and other organisations has helped Scottish Borders residents to maintain access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy.
- e) **Reduced Inequalities:** Through the dispersal of cost of living funds, Scottish Borders Council and partners have helped to identify poverty inequalities and exclusion, and provided resources to those in need.

5.5 Climate Change

There is no impact on climate change as a result of this report.

5.6 Rural Proofing

There are no rural proofing implications contained in this report.

5.7 Data Protection Impact Statement

There are no personal data implications arising from this report.

5.8 Changes to Scheme of Administration or Scheme of Delegation

There are no changes to the Scheme of Administration or Scheme of Delegation as a result of this report.

6 CONSULTATION

- 6.1 The Acting Chief Financial Officer, the Monitoring Officer/Chief Legal Officer, the Chief Officer Audit and Risk, the Director (People Performance & Change), the Clerk to the Council and Corporate Communications have been consulted and comments received have been incorporated into this report.

Approved by

Jenni Craig
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Background Papers: n/a

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Note – You can get this document on tape, in Braille, large print and various computer formats by contacting the address below. Janice Robertson can also give information on other language translations as well as providing additional copies.

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