

POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Wednesday 9 November 2022

REPORT TITLE:	WARM HUBS
REPORT OF:	DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC HEALTH

REPORT SUMMARY

This report provides an update on work undertaken to understand the need for warm hubs within the borough to support residents struggling to heat their homes due to the increase in energy costs.

For the purposes of the report warm hubs relate to any building that is or could be open to the public to enable them to keep warm.

This supports the pledges in the Wirral Plan:

Brighter Futures to ensure children get the best start in life and are not subject to, as much as possible the impact of families in poverty. The support provided across the system will help families to mitigate the impact of the cost-of-living crisis.

Inclusive economy by supporting residents and businesses to maintain employment to ensure household income is forthcoming and employment opportunities are available

Active and Healthy Lives to ensure residents do not suffer long term impact of poor physical and mental health as a result of the crisis and help and support is available through partners to prevent this at an early stage as possible

The report affects all wards in the borough.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Policy & Resources Committee is recommended to:-

1. Note the availability of warm hubs across the Borough
2. Note the work being undertaken with the Community, Voluntary and Faith sector in identifying the support required by residents to address cost of living challenges.
3. Agree that further reports on actions to address cost of living challenges for residents are reported to the Health and Wellbeing Board to ensure that there is strategic oversight from partners on action being taken to mitigate cost of living challenges.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

1.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION/S

- 1.1 Following the extra-ordinary Policy and Resources Committee in August, a series of recommendations were agreed with progress being reported back to the Committee.

2.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 2.1 In relation to the recommendations made at the August committee this paper relates to work undertaken to review the provision of warm hubs in the borough no other options were considered as this report was requested by the committee.

3.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 3.1 This report provides details of the approach taken by officers to determine the support residents are requesting in response to cost-of-living challenges including the provision of warm hubs in the borough and the services currently available to residents. The approach taken included the following actions:

- Review of good practice on the Local Government Association - Cost of Living Hub - <https://www.local.gov.uk/our-support/safer-and-more-sustainable-communities/cost-living-hub>
- Review of Warm Banks paper produced by the Policy and Strategy Team in September 2022
- Research with local people and the community, voluntary and faith sector

3.2 Review of good practice

A review of action taken by other councils shows a range of approaches being explored and implemented, many of which are already in place in Wirral. These include creating a directory of warm spaces and ensuring it is clearly marketed; offering grants to voluntary organisation to support the setting up of hubs; development of charters to ensure spaces are of sufficient quality and are those using them feel safe; marketing council buildings already open as warm hubs and offering refreshments and free access to Wi-Fi/public computers. Some councils are promoting activities available to residents in spaces already available without advertising any building as a designated warm hub.

3.3 Feedback from local people¹ and the community, voluntary and faith sector

We spoke to local people and the community voluntary and faith sector to understand the challenges they are facing, and the support offer they require. A copy of the full report can be found here <https://www.wirralintelligenceservice.org/state-of-the-borough/cost-of-living-crisis-2022-23/> . The key messages reported were as follows:

¹ During September 2022, we spoke to residents from across the borough including Bromborough, Heswall, Upton, Birkenhead, Egremont and Liscard.

The residents come from a broad range of demographics, including ages 30 to 67; working families; unemployed; single households; single parents; business owners; Black and Minority Ethnic; people with disabilities and ill health (physical and mental); homeowners, renters and social housing tenants; benefit claimants

Summary of Themes: Rising Cost of Living

Residents

- Budgeting, benefits and debt advice
- Meeting basic needs
- Transport Costs
- Concern for the winter/future
- Accessible Energy Advice
- Warm Options
- Digital exclusion
- It may be too early to understand the full impact on residents

CVF Organisations

- Increasing demand on organisations
- Rising organisational costs
- Concern for current funding
- Concern for future funding
- Impact on staff and volunteers
- Staff capacity to support individuals
- Organisational capacity

Case Studies

1. Equitable access to cost of living support opportunities
2. Wirral residents are already experiencing the wider impact of rising costs
3. Cost of Living messages need to be less confusing
4. Business owners are concerned for the future

3.4 In response to the qualitative insight, £1.2 million has been allocated from the Contain Outbreak Management Funds (COMF) to increase capacity within the Community, Voluntary and Faith (CVF) sector to support residents facing cost-of-living challenges. This funding will allow trusted, third sector organisations to increase the capacity of their services and support those communities and vulnerable residents most in need. The council has worked closely with the CVF Forum regarding the application process, internal audit will support the evaluation process and award of grants. Submissions will be evaluated by a cross directorate panel of council officers. All applications have been asked to address at least one of the following themes: food poverty, fuel poverty, warm hubs, debt and vulnerable groups i.e., the main issues people are presenting with. The grants programme launched in September and closed on Friday 14th October.

3.5 The insight team will continue to talk to local people and the CVF sector over the coming weeks to identify any rising tide issues and ensure that the current offer is meeting demand.

3.6 Warm Hubs

As requested by the Policy and Resources Committee in August we have reviewed the offer of warm hubs for residents in the borough and compared our current offer with the “asks” from local people and LGA good practice examples.

The current Wirral offer for warm hubs is as follows:

- Directory of community, voluntary and faith sector organisations and groups providing warm hubs – mapped in Infobank and updated weekly
- £1.2m of COMF funding made available to the Community Voluntary and Faith sector to support cost of living challenges and can be used to support operation of warm place
- Advertise Libraries as warm hubs (sites to be confirmed). This will be subject to a review of ventilation issues which is currently in progress.

There are a range of services available at the venues detailed above, these include:

- Outreach services for benefits and housing advice, housing, training & employment services
- Activities to support wellbeing
- Food and warm drinks available
- Free Wi-Fi and computer access (homework, device charging)

Not all venues offer all these services but this detail is included on Infobank.

We have mapped where warm hubs are available to ensure equitable access across the borough. Given the feedback from local communities the intelligence is indicating that our current offer is sufficient. The council and its partners e.g., health sector, registered social landlords will review the levels of demand over the winter period and adjust these plans accordingly via the Health and Wellbeing Board.

- 3.7 For vulnerable people who do not want to attend public hubs we are working with the NHS and Merseyside Fire Service to provide help to their homes e.g., we are in discussion with Merseyside Fire Service to enhance their safe homes scheme; discussion is taking place with the NHS re developing an offer for vulnerable people as we did during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic.

4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 An additional £1.2m has been made available from the Contain Outbreak Management Fund (COMF) for community, voluntary and faith groups to bid for to support them with the opening of warm hubs alongside the support they already offer for local people in relation to food poverty and fuel poverty. Once the grant process has concluded this additional support will be entered onto the Wirral Infobank.
- 4.2 There are several Council buildings which are open to the public e.g. libraries, leisure centres and the Williamson Art Gallery, at which residents are always welcome. At present, our work with local people is suggesting that there is no additional demand for warm hubs, this will be kept under review via ongoing insight work with local people and partners.

5.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Many of the services and support mechanisms provided by the Council are carried out through a variety of legal powers that assist those functions, having regard to the public sector equality duty, best value and other requirements.
- 5.2 As well as exercising its powers under these specific provisions, the Council has a wide-ranging general power of competence that will enable it to act in this way to secure the best interests of the Borough, its economy and the persons resident or present in its area.

6.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: STAFFING, ICT AND ASSETS

- 6.1 The current offer for warm hubs from Council premises is being provided within current resources.

7.0 RELEVANT RISKS

7.1 Continuing engagement from the Community, Voluntary and Faith Sector is key as is the contribution from Wirral partners – risks have been outlined in section three as part of the insight work with the sector.

8.0 ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION

8.1 Consultation is ongoing with partners as to the response to the crisis as part of the normal and frequent dialogue that takes place. Partners have been working together for some time to determine the impact and the mitigations that are already in place and what additional support can be provided

8.2 A comprehensive insight programme with residents, businesses and the CVF sector is underway as outlined in section 3.

9.0 EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

9.1 The Council has a legal requirement to make sure its policies, and the way it carries out its work, do not discriminate against anyone. An Equality Impact Assessment is a tool to help council services identify steps they can take to ensure equality for anyone who might be affected by a particular policy, decision or activity. The EIA for this work is attached at <https://www.wirral.gov.uk/communities-and-neighbourhoods/equality-impact-assessments>.

10.0 ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS

10.1 Actions to mitigate the cost-of-living crisis will also contribute towards attainment of Wirral Cool 2 Strategy, and the Councils carbon net zero target by 2030. For example:

- Heating and powering buildings currently makes up 40% of the UK's total energy usage. Support provided to reduce risks of fuel poverty may include improving the energy efficiency of homes, which will have a beneficial impact on reducing carbon emissions.
- Initiatives related to supporting people in food poverty may also support the reduction of food waste.

11.0 COMMUNITY WEALTH IMPLICATIONS

11.1 By its nature, the activity identified in this report will take place across Wirral and will be based around the local public sector and community organisations active in the Borough. There will be an impact on the wealth of residents and businesses from the crisis as available income will be limited and businesses may fail. Anchor institutions will, as part of the system-based response will work as much as possible to mitigate any impact from the crisis, but it is inevitable that the implications for community wealth will be detrimental.

REPORT AUTHOR:

Julie Webster

telephone: 0151 666 5142

email: juliewebster@wirral.gov.uk

APPENDICES

None

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Local Government Association, Cost of Living Evidence Hub: <https://www.local.gov.uk/our-support/safer-and-more-sustainable-communities/cost-living-hub>

Cost of Living Crisis, Wirral Intelligence Service JSNA, Wirral Council: <https://www.wirralintelligenceservice.org/state-of-the-borough/cost-of-living-crisis-2022/>

SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date
Policy and Resources Committee	31 August 2022
Policy and Resources Committee	5 October 2022