



**Hinckley & Bosworth
Borough Council**

Forward timetable of consultation and decision making

Scrutiny Commission 14 March 2024

Wards affected: All wards

COST OF LIVING UPDATE

Report of Director, Community Services

1. Purpose of report

- 1.1 To update Scrutiny on the work undertaken by the authority in response to the cost of living crisis.
- 1.2 To update on key achievements and workstreams in relation to those experiencing financial hardship.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1 To note the extensive work undertaken by the authority to support residents of the borough affected by the cost of living crisis.
- 2.2 To note the increase in demand upon services due to the cost of living crisis.

3. Background to the report

- 3.1 In light of the growing financial strain faced by Hinckley and Bosworth's residents, the authority took the proactive step of declaring a Cost of Living Emergency in August 2022.
- 3.2 Work to tackle the impacts of the cost of living takes place across the authority with the work coordinated and led by the Community Services, Safeguarding and Housing Teams.
- 3.3 The Hinckley and Bosworth Community Health and Wellbeing Plan 2023-2026 recognises five key priorities for the local community, with rising living costs identified as a primary concern. Actions to address the current cost of living are being collaboratively delivered with key stakeholders. It has also

been highlighted that there is a high number of cross cutting themes and workstreams with that of another two of the priorities identified in the Health and Wellbeing Plan, namely Housing and Mental Health.

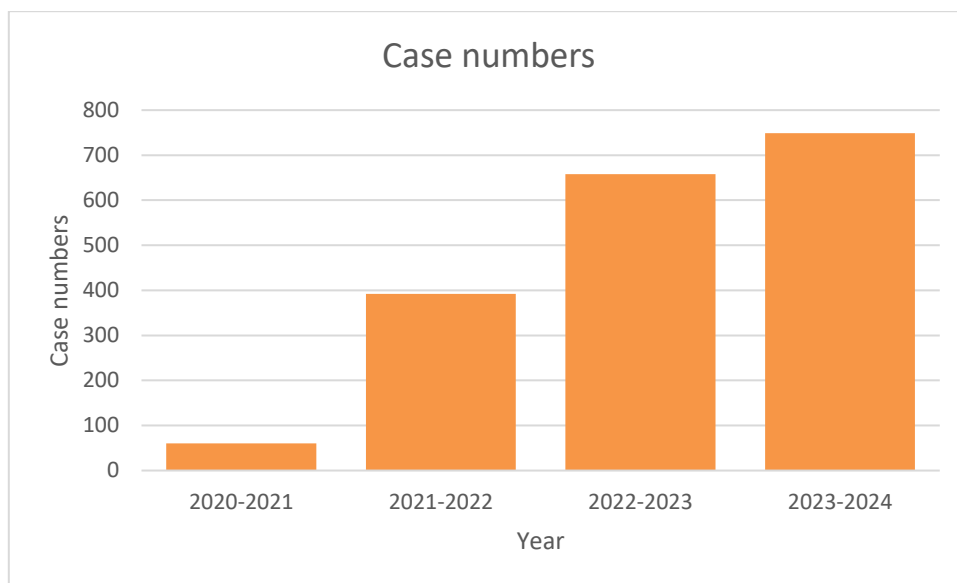
- 3.4 Many of Hinckley and Bosworth borough's residents are currently struggling with rising living costs. The council believes it is important that people know what support is available that could benefit them and that they are supported to maximise their income. In response to this the council have a Welfare Support Team to help those who are struggling financially with their priority bills such as rent, council tax, energy, water and food. The service prioritises those people who have no one else to help and who are the most vulnerable. The authority established the Welfare Support Service initially in response to arising concerns following Covid-19. The service was initially financed via funding carried forward from Government in relation to additional burdens caused by the pandemic. The service was developed further in response to the cost of living crisis and funding from UKSPF has recently enabled the authority to put in place two full time officers to manage and respond to the growing number of referrals to this service until the end March 2025.
- 3.5 A dedicated [cost of living page](#) has been created on the council's webpage so that residents can readily find and access support available to them. Articles have also been produced for the borough bulletin and posters put in local areas so that individuals who may not have access to the web are aware of the services available. Wider communications via our partner networks and at local events has further enabled as many people across the borough as possible knowing about the services available to them.

4. Welfare Support Service

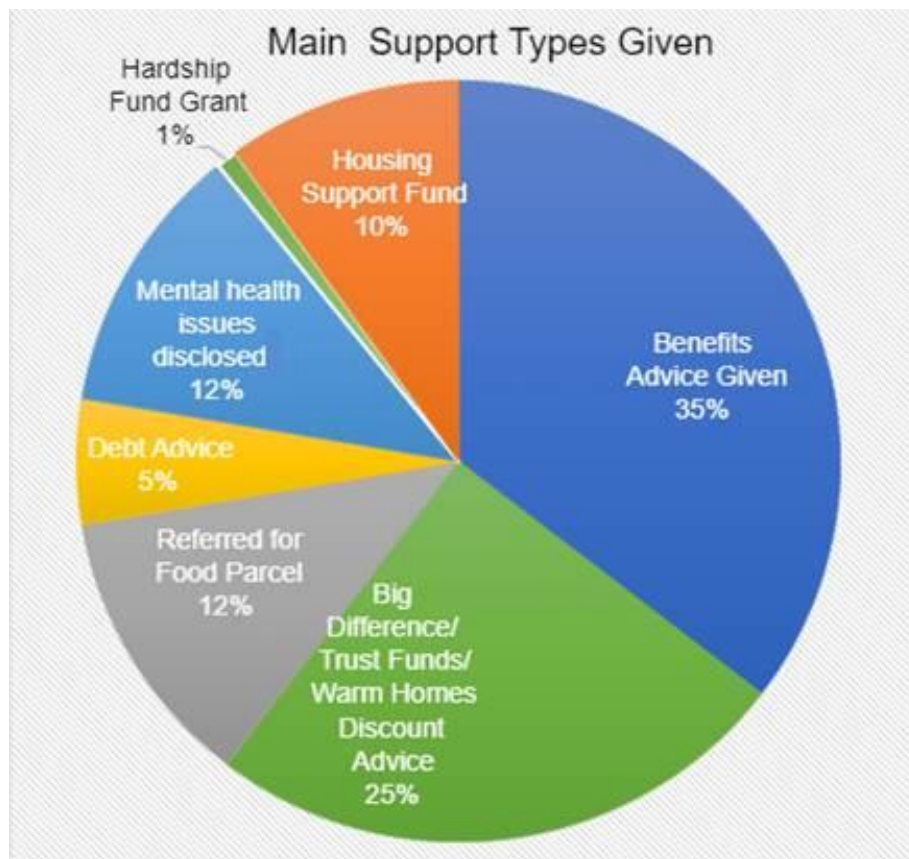
- 4.1 The council's Welfare Support Service is a key point of contact for residents in financial hardship in Hinckley and Bosworth. The service provides debt, benefit, and money advice on the phone or if necessary, in residents homes. The service is free, impartial, and confidential. The service aims to work holistically with residents to ensure that people get the help they need. If further needs are identified, such as mental health or isolation, then we will work with other partners to carry out signposting and onward referrals. Residents wishing to engage with the Welfare Support Service can self-refer or can be referred by another agency or team within the borough council.
- 4.2 In order to assist more residents, a drop-in advice service has been established at the hub every Wednesday from 10am to 2pm. Residents can turn up without an appointment and get instant advice on benefits, the household support fund, and how to maximise household income. The drop-in service has been running since August 2023 and has been well attended.
- 4.3 In November 2023, two Money Advice and Wellbeing Events were delivered, bringing a variety of support services together for residents to attend and access support and advice. These followed a similar format to the previous cost of living events held in late 2022 and early 2023. The November 2023 events were held in Barwell and Barlestone, providing residents with an accessible

platform to access guidance and assistance on a range of issues such as household budgeting, benefits, housing, managing energy bills and fuel bills, managing debt and food support.

- 4.4 Since its launch in 2020, the Welfare Support service has experienced sustained growth in referrals, highlighted in the bar chart below. This demonstrates the crucial role the service plays in supporting our community and highlights the potential for further expansion. Early data reflects the initial establishment phase.



- 4.5 This financial year to date, the Welfare Support service has already worked with 749 individuals, tackling their challenges through over 1000 different interventions. From securing benefits to accessing food parcels and the Household Support Fund, the team has gone the extra mile to support residents in need. The below graph illustrates the main types of support given so far in 2023/24.



4.6 Feedback on the impact of the service has been extremely positive and below is a small sample of testimonials from service users and partners:

- Client was referred to welfare support in Autumn time last year as they were financially struggling with the rising costs with inflation. Client rang to say they felt extremely supported and grateful to the officer that dealt with them as they never realised how much support they could get. They were also scared about applying for DHP as they said they had no idea what they were doing so the support they had was amazing. They would highly recommend the care, support and friendly approach the team have and how they made them feel comfortable to talk about their struggles with inflation.
- Client rang to say a big thank you for getting help with her electric, gas and food.
- "I feel very fortunate to have such supportive connections."
- "Thanks again for your ongoing help and support it really is beyond appreciated."

5. Cadent Funding

5.1 Cadent Gas Limited are the UK's largest gas distribution network (GDN), operating 4 networks in the Eastern, North London, Northwest & West Midlands regions of England. As a regulated business, Ofgem issue Cadent with a series of objectives, conditions and allowances to support customers living in vulnerable situations across their networks. Cadent's most recent set of objectives and conditions have taken the form of a "use it or lose it"

allowance called the Vulnerability & Carbon Monoxide Allowance (VCMA). Cadent often elects to work with expert partners to identify customers and provide important safeguarding services to them (such as income maximisation, energy efficiency and carbon monoxide safety advice).

- 5.2 The authority was successful in a bid to the Vulnerability & Carbon Monoxide Allowance fund for £228,446.07. With the funding awarded from Cadent the Council will expand the Welfare Support Service in priority areas working from the proposed Centres for Warmth detailed in 5.3 and doing outreach work in the communities that need our help the most, such as those with higher deprivation and those that are geographically isolated.
- 5.3 With the funding the Council's Community Houses in Earl Shilton, Barwell, Wykin and Burbage will become 'Centres for Warmth'. They will offer Carbon Monoxide awareness, Priority Services Register awareness, deliver cooking on a budget sessions and offer the extended welfare support services for individuals who are struggling with the current cost of living.

6. Food Poverty

- 6.1 Food poverty is a growing concern in Hinckley and Bosworth, and the current emergency food provision system is struggling to cope with the demand. The current system of providing emergency food parcels is not sustainable and is not addressing the root causes of food poverty. Foodbanks are being used more and more, and there is a lack of clear pathways to support residents beyond emergency provision. To date, this financial year, the welfare support team has issued over 146 food parcels, either directly or via the Household Support Fund (HSF). We are working very closely with emergency food providers to create a more cohesive approach to food poverty and are looking to establish a local Food Partnership. It is envisaged that The Food Partnership will work collaboratively to look at a more holistic approach to emergency food provision which looks to lift people out of food poverty and into more sustainable offers such as community kitchens and social supermarkets.
- 6.2 Feed the Hungry previously offered a delivery service for emergency food parcels to individuals who were unable to physically access one of the many emergency food providers on a given day. Unfortunately, due to a decline in volunteer availability, Feed the Hungry was compelled to discontinue this valuable service. In response to this gap in service provision, the local authority and Feed the Hungry have initiated a plan to place food parcels in key community buildings throughout the district. Given that the majority of residents can readily access their GP surgeries, we believe that partnering with these practices presents a strategic and accessible approach to distributing food assistance. There are currently 6 GP surgeries signed up to this initiative and holding food parcels on site. This scheme is constantly developing with the hope that we will have full GP coverage in the district going forward.

7 Warm Welcomes/Warm Spaces

- 7.1 In Hinckley and Bosworth and nationally concerns around the increasing costs of living and heating during winter 2022 to 2023 saw the emergence of local interventions to establish warm spaces. Typically, these were established and run by communities and voluntary and community organisations to offer a warm space, often with additional resources, for example hot drinks, internet access and support services.
- 7.2 This Winter we have locally rebranded warm spaces as Warm Welcome due to feedback from warm space operators that the name created a stigma that may put individuals off of accessing the spaces.
- 7.3 Each venue's offer is different but will always be warm and offer the opportunity for residents to meet other people and have a free hot drink, some offer a snack, warm meal and craft activities.
- 7.4 A friendly URL link has been created to send out information about warm welcome on the council's web page www.hinckley-bosworth.gov.uk/warmwelcome and a directory added with the offers available and links to the venue's Facebook Pages. There are more than 48 locations established, providing over 100 Warm Welcome sessions every week.
- 7.5 Guidance notes and an application process have been created for Warm Welcomes to apply for grants of £1200 to help with associated costs of providing a warm welcome provision during the current Winter period. This is being administered by the Community Service and Safeguarding Team and currently we have approved 15 Warm Welcome provision grants across the borough amounting to £18,000.
- 7.6 A dedicated Warm Welcome Officer, funded via UKSPF funds, has progressed this area of work and is working closely with Warm Welcome's across the borough to offer support around promotion, access to warm packs, access to holistic services and any other support they may need. Some examples so far are that a generic Warm Welcome poster has been produced that all Warm Welcome's can use to promote their offer and via Warm Welcome's we have distributed over 30 warm packs to those most in need since November.

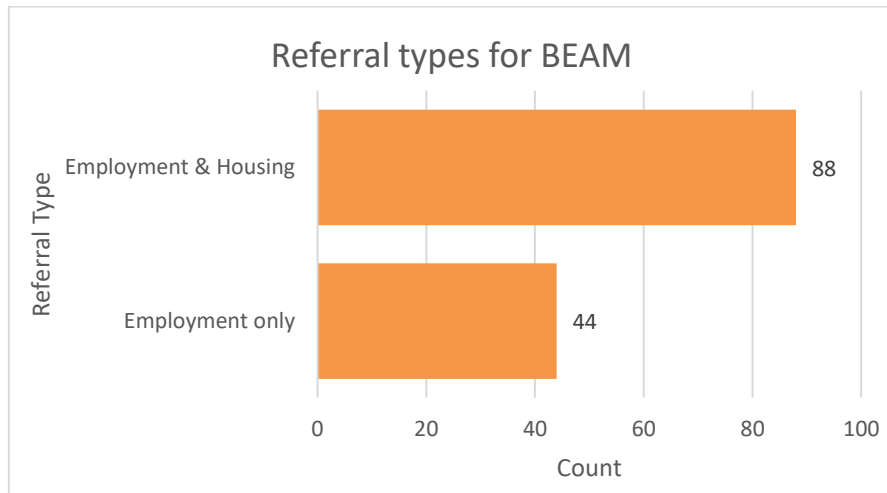
8 Welfare and Financial Hardship Partnerships

- 8.1 Citizen's Advice (CA) are a key partner in the Borough providing critical services and advise to residents. Without the presence of Citizen's Advice demand for council services would likely increase and some residents' issues, particularly around debt, would become worse with more costly interventions needed. CA continue to see significant increases in the demand for their services, between 20/21 and 22/23 there was an overall 31% increase in clients and a 44% increase in issues dealt with. In 2022/23 CA had 3258 clients in Hinckley and Bosworth.

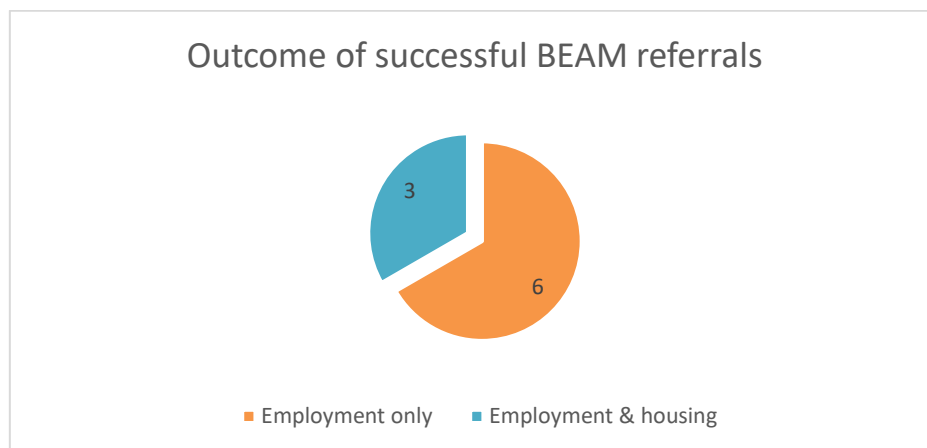
8.2 To ensure we are working collaboratively across all services when supporting people in financial hardship we have re established the Welfare and Financial Hardship Group with partners to ensure we are sharing key updates, sharing information, identifying and mitigating gaps in service provision and working consistently across the borough. The group includes partners from DWP, Revenues and Benefits, Welfare Support, Housing, Citizens Advice and Clockwise.

9 BEAM

9.1 Recognising the broader impacts of the cost of living crisis, the local authority has partnered up with BEAM. BEAM is a social enterprise that crowdfunds new career opportunities for people struggling with housing or unemployment. They provide them with a support network and the relevant tools and skills to find housing and employments via the kindness of strangers. BEAM has received a total of 132 referrals for Hinckley and Bosworth residents. The graph below illustrates the types of referrals.



9.2 There have been a total of 9 successful referrals for BEAM resulting in residents being supported to find not only employment but sustainable housing too.



10 Housing

- 10.1 The cost of living crisis continues to affect people's access and sustainability to housing across the UK, and Hinckley and Bosworth is no exception. Crisis research published in March 2022 suggested that families on the breadline are facing an average £372 deficit between their Local Housing Allowance and the cost of the cheapest rents in their local areas. The cost of living crisis combined with existing issues such as rising rents, low wages and a lack of affordable housing has created increased pressure for people and families who were already struggling. Consequently, many local authorities continue to see an increased and sustained homelessness pressure, and the subsequent demand for temporary accommodation.
- 10.2 Locally, this is further evidenced by the sustained increase in homelessness presentations and the dramatic rise in the number of families requiring temporary accommodation to relieve their homelessness which is detailed in the tables below.

Table 1- Number of homelessness approaches per year including monthly average in brackets

	April 20- March 21	April 21- March 22	April 22- March 23	April 23- to date
Number of approaches for assistance	605 (50)	1,003 (83)	1,168 (97)	882 (94)

Table 2- Number of households in temporary accommodation

Year	Number of families in B&B	Number of singles in B&B	Total cases in B&B	Numbers in hostel
2020/2021	24 (12.12%)	174 (87.88%)	198 (Covid)	49
2021/2022	26 (13.20%)	171 (86.80%)	197 (Covid)	64
2022/2023	64 (30.77%)	144 (69.23%)	208	54
2023- to date	104 (42.28%)	142 (57.72%)	246	66

- 10.3 Housing need is further evidenced by the numbers on the Council's housing register for affordable housing. There are currently 1042 live applications on the council housing register. However, this is not a full picture of need within the borough as many people don't apply to the council for housing as they know they are unlikely to receive an offer of accommodation. The fact that there is an increase in homelessness is an indication of unmet need, and the recorded figures don't reflect hidden homelessness i.e., people who are living in insecure accommodation, often sofa surfing.

10.4 Discretionary Housing payments

Discretionary Housing Payments are advanced by the Revenues and Benefits partnership to help a claimant with rent or housing costs if existing benefits do not cover them. Since April 1, 2023, 204 awards have so far been made, and sustained demand is further anticipated.

10.5 Council Tenants

The council has 3200 homes which are widely dispersed across the borough. The Tenancy Management team provides the landlord function for the housing service. Supporting tenants to sustain their tenancies with the council is a key priority for the team and so far this financial year 92 referrals have been made to the Welfare support team for advice and assistance.

11. Financial implications [CS]

11.1 The following table details the external funding secured per year towards these workstreams:

Workstream	Funding Body	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	TOTAL
Welfare support	UKSPF	£40,000	£80,000	£80,000	£0	£200,000
Centres for Warmth	Cadent	£0	£57,110	£114,220	£57,116	£228,446
Warm Spaces	UKSPF	£35,000	£60,000	£90,000	£0	£185,000
BEAM	UKSPF	£30,000	£30,000	£30,000	£0	£90,000
TOTAL		£105,000	£227,110	£314,220	£57,116	£703,446

11.2 In 2023/24, an estimated £149,209 of DHP's will be made. Of this, £78,739 will be met from external funding leaving £70,470 to be met from the general fund.

12. Legal implications [MR]

12.1 None

13. Corporate Plan implications

13.1 This report relates to priority ambitions of Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council's Corporate Plan 2022-25, namely:

- People
- Place
- Prosperity

14. Consultation

- 14.1 Relevant council teams have been consulted in the preparation of this report, alongside relevant information and intelligence from key partners such as emergency food providers, voluntary organisations and service user data.

15. Risk implications

- 15.1 It is the council's policy to proactively identify and manage significant risks which may prevent delivery of business objectives.
- 15.2 It is not possible to eliminate or manage all risks all of the time and risks will remain which have not been identified. However, it is the officer's opinion based on the information available, that the significant risks associated with this decision / project have been identified, assessed and that controls are in place to manage them effectively.
- 15.3 The following significant risks associated with this report / decisions were identified from this assessment:

Management of significant (Net Red) risks

Risk description	Mitigating actions	Owner
Current Welfare Support Service is reliant on temporary external funding	Continue to look to identify and access external funding opportunities and opportunities to sustain the welfare support service	AC/RB

16. Knowing your community – equality and rural implications

- 16.1 Council services, including welfare support services are promoted and delivered across the borough. Expanded work with Cadent funding will look to further enhance accessibility of the welfare support service and reach into all communities via outreach work.
- 16.2 Statistics are captured for services within this report to ensure that any gaps in access can be identified and rectified.

17. Climate implications

- 17.1 Work will be delivered to limit carbon impact where possible, for example virtual methods of engagement and paperless systems.

18. Corporate implications

- 18.1 By submitting this report, the report author has taken the following into account:
- Community safety implications
 - Environmental implications

- ICT implications
 - Asset management implications
 - Procurement implications
 - Human resources implications
 - Planning implications
 - Data protection implications
 - Voluntary sector
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Background papers: None

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