



**Hinckley & Bosworth
Borough Council**

Forward timetable of consultation and decision making

Scrutiny Commission	13 March 2025
Executive	26 March 2025

Wards affected: All wards.

COST OF LIVING UPDATE

Report of Director, Community Services

1. Purpose of report

To update Scrutiny on

- 1.1 The work undertaken by the authority in response to the cost of living crisis.
- 1.2 Key achievements and workstreams in relation to those experiencing financial hardship.

2. Recommendation

That Scrutiny

- 2.1 Acknowledges and endorses the extensive work undertaken by the authority to support residents of the borough affected by the cost of living crisis, work which has been acknowledged and endorsed by the recent Peer Challenge.
- 2.2 Acknowledge the increase in demand upon services due to the cost of living crisis.

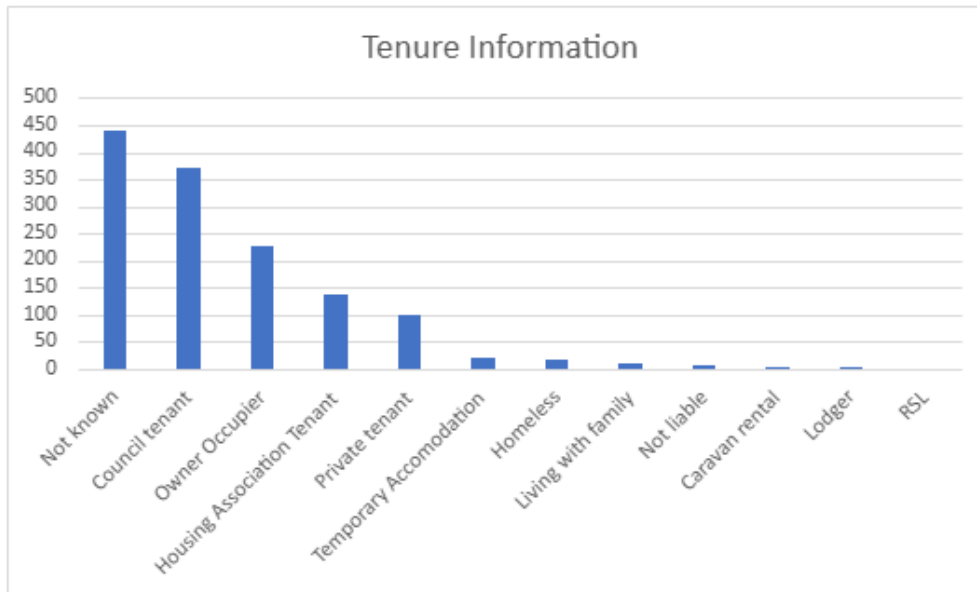
3. Background to the report

- 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.

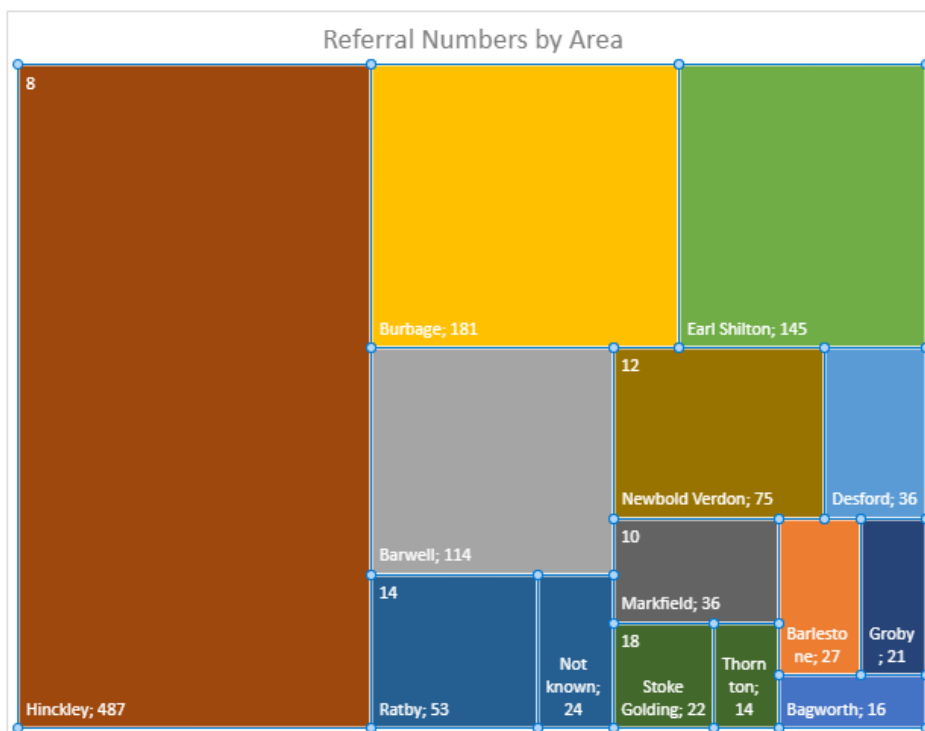
- 3.2 Work to tackle the impacts of the cost of living takes place across the authority with the work coordinated and led by the Community Services, Safeguarding and Housing Teams.
- 3.3 The Hinckley and Bosworth [Community Health and Wellbeing Plan 2023-2026](#) recognises five key priorities for the 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.
- 3.5 The council has a dedicated [cost of living webpage](#) which provides details of advice and support available in the borough.
- 3.6 A summary of some of the achievements for 2024-25 detailed within this report is provided as an infographic at Appendix 1.

4. **Welfare Support Service**

- 4.1 The Service remains jointly funded by the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) and Cadent. Funding is in place to support this service up until 31st March 26. The Welfare Support Service offers advice and provides support to any resident who has financial concerns. The Welfare Support Service works closely with residents in a holistic way, to enable them to access the most appropriate support including emergency food provision, grants and funds, benefits eligibility, income maximisation, and budgeting help.
- 4.2 During the first three quarters of 2024/25 the welfare support service assisted 1,210 Hinckley and Bosworth residents who were experiencing financial hardship. 71% of those residents were accessing the service for the first time.
- 4.3 The graph below shows that 30.6% of all referrals, in the first three quarters of 2024/25, were Hinckley and Bosworth Council tenants. We continue to work closely with the council's rents team to ensure referrals to the welfare support service continue at the earliest point of rent arrears being identified.



4.4 Funding from Cadent in 2023/24 afforded the service the ability to access more rural communities that may otherwise struggle to access the service. The graph below shows that we are now seeing increased amounts of referrals from those in the northern parishes of our borough, such as Ratby and Markfield.



4.5 The weekly welfare support service drop in at Hinckley Hub continued throughout the first two quarters of 2024/25. In response to demand patterns and to ensure effective use of staff resource this has been changed to the first Wednesday of each month.

4.6 The Welfare Support Service continues to reach those most vulnerable, of the 1,210 referrals received, 120 of them disclosed mental health issues and 55 of them accepted an onward referral to mental health support services. 27 required a safeguarding referral.

4.7 An example of customer feedback is shown below:

Client was referred to welfare support 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.

5.0 Warm Welcomes

5.1 The Council has taken on a supporting role to assist Warm Spaces provisions across the borough following the emergence of Warm Spaces during the winter of 2022-23 due to increasing costs of living and heating. Rebranded as Warm Welcomes they are 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.

5.2 In 2023 a Warm Welcome Grant Fund was launched to support voluntary and community sector organisations who provide a warm welcome for residents in Hinckley and Bosworth borough. The grant was increased from £1200 in 2023-24 to £1500 for the 2024/25 winter season. The current threshold for grant applications are that Warm Welcomes must:

- Offer a heated space for at least 4 months during the winter months
- Be open and accessible to everyone
- Offer refreshments such as a warm drink
- Be completely free of charge
- Offer a provision for at least 8 hours per month

Examples of associated costs may include energy costs linked to the delivery of the project, food and refreshment costs, improving or enhancing the provision or expenses for a new activity.

5.3 Some achievements for the project during the winter season of 2023-24 are shown below:

- 51 venues were listed as Warm Welcomes on the borough council's cost of living website
- 24 grants were approved
- 30 warm packs were distributed to those most in need who either had no heating, were using temporary heaters or in debt with their energy suppliers and unable to heat their homes

- 100 warm welcome sessions were provided each week with 8931 visits
- 100 volunteers supported the running of the sessions, this increased to 234 with the community libraries and equated to 8344 volunteer hours
- 1546 households received support i.e. hot meals, emergency good, wellbeing support, energy efficiency advice and warm packs
- During the coldest week in December, the total number of individuals who attended a session was 449, this increased to 636 when including community libraires.

5.4 During May 2024 a networking and celebration event took place at the Hinckley Hub for Warm Welcome leaders and volunteers. The event was well attended, and discussions took place around successes and challenges as well as solutions for barriers faced by venues. Feedback from the event was extremely positive and a couple of examples include:

“You did a great job with the community welcome event. Inspiring to see how many organisations across the borough made a difference. It's lovely to see so many people accessing support:

“I really enjoyed the event, a fantastic opportunity to network. I was really moved by some of the stories that I heard. It's obvious that the environment the warm welcome spaces is nurturing is really having a positive impact on the mental health for the service users. You should be proud of what you have achieved”.

Following the end of the current winter season, a networking and celebration event will be planned to take place during May 2025.

- 5.5 The Warm Welcomes Support Officer supports this coordination work and is funded through UKSPF funding until the end of March 2026. The operational budget to continue to provide warm welcome grants to the voluntary and community sector is also supported by UKSPF funding.
- 5.6 During this winter season, October 2024 – March 2025 there are currently 60 Warm Welcomes, an increase of 10 from the previous year, promoted on the council's web page www.hinckley-bosworth.gov.uk/warmwelcome providing around 125 sessions every week.
- 5.7 Many residents access further support through these Warm Welcome sessions including foodbank referrals, emergency food parcels, mental health support and warm packs. The Warm Welcome Support Officer provides support around promotion and has created posters for Warm Welcomes to promote their offer. The officer links in with local support agencies and supports local events.
- 5.8 This winter 2024/25 we have to date distributed 38 Warm Welcome grants to voluntary and community sector organisations totalling £57,000.

6. Food Poverty

- 6.1 The cost of living crisis has led to a rapid decrease in the level of disposable income available to individuals and households alike. When income is tight food is typically one of the first expenses to be cut.
- 6.2 In May 2024, via UKSPF Funding, we created a Food Poverty Officer post. The role of the Food Poverty Officer is to take a strategic and sustainable approach to tackle food poverty. This entails addressing the root causes and providing comprehensive support to food provisions, services and residents alike.
- 6.3 Since coming into post in May 2024 the Food Poverty Officer has already made significant progress in addressing food poverty within the borough.

Key achievements to date include:

- **Mental Health Support and Training:** Following feedback from foodbanks and their volunteers, the officer has implemented mental health training programs for volunteers to enhance their understanding of the challenges faced by individuals experiencing food poverty.
- **Operational Support and Resource Provision:** The officer has provided essential operational provisions, including resource packs and contact directories. This aims to ensure that users of the foodbanks are referred to wider support agencies to address the root cause of the food poverty issue. They have also actively supported new and existing provisions in enhancing their services through donations, referral processes, and partnership links.
- **Community Engagement and Education:** The officer has been instrumental in promoting healthy eating habits and providing educational resources such as healthy start information, educational courses such as Multiply, recipe cards, shopping tips, and provision tables. They are also developing a hot meal calendar and affordable food initiatives to assist all residents, but specifically those in temporary accommodation who may struggle to provide themselves a hot meal.
- **Network Building and Collaboration:** The officer has established a Food Poverty Network to ensure collaboration and knowledge sharing among relevant provisions. The first meeting took place in October 2024, and all key providers attended and gave positive feedback about the creation of the network. Regular network meetings with individual providers have been held to discuss common challenges and opportunities. Furthermore, partnerships have been formed with organisations such as Make Lunch, Rural Community Council, This Book Belongs to Me, and community champions to strengthen the community response to food poverty.
- **Data Management and Communication:** The officer is working on data collection from both food provisions and internal teams to enable us to look at need in a more detailed and comprehensive way and look at ways

to address any gaps in provisions identified. A key area identified via the network is data sharing between provisions and the local authority, work is underway to address this.

- **Internal Referral Process:** It has been highlighted that there may be some inconsistency in referrals from Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council to emergency food providers. Work is underway on a streamlined questionnaire, for all teams to use. This will ensure there is consistency in quality of referrals across teams and that residents are signposted to the most appropriate provision for their needs.

6.4 The Community House team have continued to run community kitchens across the borough. These cooking sessions provide free sessions to cook healthy meals on a budget. This year there have been sessions running in 6 locations; Burbage, Barwell, Newbold Verdon, Ratby, Barlestone and Earl Shilton. There is good attendance at all sessions with between 8 to 16 people attending each session.

7. Uniform Swap Shop

7.1 The Welfare Support Service ran its first Uniform Swap Shop project in the summer of 2024. School uniform swap shops were set up in local co-ops and community venues across Hinckley and Bosworth to help families prepare for the new school term. Residents were encouraged to donate good quality school uniforms no longer required. The aim of the swap shop was to support residents in saving money on school uniform costs as well as cutting down on clothes being sent to landfill.

7.2 The aim of the project was to assist families across the borough, with the rising cost of living. During the summer period we often see an increase in families needing to access food banks or struggling to pay priority debts due to the mounting cost of school uniforms.

7.3 Over 50 schools in our borough were represented across the 9 locations. The project was promoted through schools, social prescribers, and social media



7.4 Assessing the impact of this project presents challenges, yet we observed a nearly 4% reduction in foodbank usage across the borough compared to the same period last year, when the swap shop was not in operation. While this decrease cannot be directly attributed to the swap shop's influence, it is a promising indicator. Additionally, the Uniform Swap Shop executed a successful social media campaign to boost project awareness. One Facebook post alone garnered 11,500 impressions and over 600 engagements. The project also contributes to Hinckley and Bosworth's Climate Change and Biodiversity Strategy by reducing the amount of unwanted uniform ending up in landfill.

8.0 Pension Credits

8.1 In August 2024, the new government announced that pensioners would no longer automatically receive a winter fuel payment and instead would only receive the payment if they were in receipt of the qualifying benefit, Pension Credits.

8.2 Pension Credits have historically been underclaimed. Since the recent announcement, Welfare Support has been collaborating with partners and internal teams, such as Housing and Revenues and Benefits, to promote Pension Credits eligibility to the appropriate residents in the borough. By partnering with our Revenue and Benefits team, we have adopted a more targeted and collaborative approach. This includes working with the Department of Work and Pensions to ensure that all eligible residents, particularly those receiving State Pensions and Housing Benefit, are informed about Pension Credits. In addition to this to raise awareness, we have:

- Published articles in the residents' newsletter.
- Shared information on social media.
- Updated our dedicated cost of living web pages.

8.3 We actively promote Pension Credits to all eligible Welfare Support referrals. Additionally, we have partnered with Local Area Coordinators, Citizen's Advice, and Social Prescribers to ensure consistent messaging across the borough. Welfare Support and Pension Credit posters have also been placed in all doctor's surgeries within the borough.

9 Housing

9.1 Housing pressures remain a significant social and economic challenge across the UK both in terms of a shortage of affordable homes and wider financial pressures. Increasingly many households are struggling to manage housing expenses. In response to these challenges, the government has announced plans to build 1.5 million new homes over the next 5 years. However, concerns continue regarding the affordability of these homes given ongoing cost of living pressures and wider financial impacts.

9.2 Impending renters reform legislation, the Renters' Rights Bill is intended to strengthen tenant rights but there is widespread concern that the additional

requirements on landlords may result in many leaving the sector which could lead to additional homelessness and housing pressures both locally and nationally.

9.3 Housing demand

Housing need in the borough is reflected in the increased demand for affordable housing through the Council's Housing Register and the increased demand for Housing Options/Homelessness Services. The number of live applications on the housing register has increased year on year as illustrated below in table A:

Table A: Number of households on the housing register

Year	Number of people on the housing register
2020/21	717
2021/22	895
2023/24	1270

9.4 Homelessness

The disjoin between housing supply and demand is illustrated through ongoing homelessness demands, which continue to be a significant pressure on the council. Table B provides the number of homelessness approaches per year. The main reasons for homelessness include people being asked to leave their accommodation by family and the issuing of section 21 notices, followed by domestic abuse.

Table B: Number of homelessness approaches per year

	April 20-March21	April 21-March 22	April 22-March 23	April 23-to March 24	April 24 to date
Number of approaches for assistance	605 (50)	1,003 (83)	1,168 (97)	1,160 (97)	946 until the end of December 24 (105)

9.5 Changes in the private rented sector have significantly impacted on both the demand for homelessness services and the availability of private rented properties to discharge homeless duty into or use for preventing homelessness. The Renters Rights' Bill is further expected to impact the private rental sector and could see many landlords exiting the market due to new mandates including a requirement to join a landlord data base and the introduction of a decent homes standard.

9.6 Council Housing Stock

The council has 3211 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 remains a firm priority for the team. This year, 271 referrals have been made to the Welfare support team for advice and assistance.

9.7 Decarbonisation and energy efficiency improvements

A key priority for the council's Housing Service is to decarbonise by 2035 (2030 fuel poor households). The Housing Service continues to maximise opportunities to access grant funding to enable us to make improvements to our stock. Previously we successfully obtained £1.4m of grant funding via the Social Housing Decarbonisation fund which enabled us to improve the thermal efficiency of 100 of our council properties. 46 properties received improvement measures in 2023/24, with a further 70 planned to be complete in 2024/25. The Council has recently submitted a further bid to the Warm Homes fund which has now superseded the Social Housing Decarbonisation fund. If successful, this will allow us to improve the energy efficiency of a further 220 homes over the next 3 years which will assist tenants with energy efficiency and reduced fuel bills.

9.8 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, 2024, 194 awards have so far been made, and sustained demand is further anticipated.

10. Financial implications [CS]

10.1 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	£51,398*	£251,398
Centres for Warmth	Cadent	£0	£57,110	£114,220	£57,116	£228,446
Warm Spaces	UKSPF	£35,000	£60,000	£90,000	£95,023*	£280,023
Food Poverty	UKSPF	£0	£0	£39,110	£35,898*	£75,008
BEAM	UKSPF	£30,000	£60,000	£30,000	£0	£120,000
TOTAL		£105,000	£257,110	£353,330	£239,435	£954,875

*Further UKSPF funding has been awarded to HBBC for 2025/26. The allocation of this funding over individual projects is currently being finalised

11. Legal implications [ST]

11.2 None

12. Corporate Plan implications

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

13. Consultation

- 13.1 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.

14. Risk implications

- 14.1 It is the council's policy to proactively identify and manage significant risks which may prevent delivery of business objectives.
- 14.2 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.
- 14.3 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, Warm Welcome Support and Food Poverty work is reliant on temporary external funding	Continue to look to identify and access external funding opportunities and opportunities to sustain services	AC/RB

15. Knowing your community – equality and rural implications

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

16. Climate implications

- 16.1 Work will be delivered to limit carbon impact where possible, for example virtual methods of engagement and paperless systems.
- 16.2 Community kitchen work helps to educate communities on reducing food waste.
- 16.3 Uniform swap shop work reduces school uniforms going to landfill.

17. Corporate implications

- 17.1 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

Background papers: Appendix 1 – Cost of Living Infographic 2024-25

Contact officers: Rachel Burgess Ext 5400, Amie Carroll Ext 5746, Madeleine Shellard Ext 5746

Executive member: Councillor M Mullaney