



Preston
City Council

Report by the Task and Finish Group – Cost of Living

**Do you need
help with
essentials such
as household
bills?**



Work Plan Study on Cost of Living

December 2022 – April 2023

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Link to meetings:

[7 December 2022](#)

[16 January 2023](#)

[20 February 2023](#)

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1. Chair's Foreword and Acknowledgements

The Task and Finish Group – Cost of Living has reviewed the cost of living crisis being experienced throughout the United Kingdom, from the perspective of Preston residents.

This proved such a multi-faceted topic and Members met several organisations, individuals together with officers from Preston City Council and Lancashire County Council, to discuss ways that they are supporting communities. The interviewees were also asked how the Council could best assist them, as well as individuals who are currently in need of support.

During the course of the study, the Authority has introduced new procedures as suggested by interviewees and Members. I am happy to present this report to Cabinet, whereby further measures can be introduced following the agreement of the recommendations.

The Group is wholly supportive of the individuals and organisations who work in partnership to assist people experiencing difficulties and we gained valuable knowledge.

I would like to thank everyone involved in this study which has proven to be very interesting and worthwhile.

Councillor Hindle

Chair of the Task and Finish Group – Cost of Living

Membership

Membership 2022/23 Municipal Year



Councillor Hindle (Chair)



Councillor Saksena (Vice-Chair)



Councillor Mrs Atkins



Councillor Potter



Councillor Mrs Brooks



Councillor Stephen Whittam



Councillor Hart



Councillor Wise

2. Recommendations to Cabinet – Specific/Measurable/Achievable/Realistic/Timely

	Recommendation	Date to be implemented	Officer & Organisation Responsible
1.	That Council Tax bills and reminder notices be updated to encourage understanding and take up of support on offer.	Ongoing	Deputy Chief Executive, Preston City Council
2.	Vulnerability training and data collection be undertaken. Policy and training programme to be issued June 2023.	Ongoing / June 2023	Corporate Management Team
3.	Grant funding phase 1 of UKSPF has been agreed and focus will be made on supporting voluntary sector in accessing: - <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grant funding; • Buildings and Infrastructure; • Sports and activities; • Skills; • Digital Access 	Ongoing	Deputy Chief Executive
4.	Work with voluntary sector to identify persons in need of aid from the Household Support Fund (HSF). Increased capacity into delivery of HSF to speed up applications.	Ongoing	Assistant Director (Head of Advice and Community Services)
5.	Examine support specifically for women impacted by violence including raising awareness and making funding available.	Ongoing	Deputy Chief Executive
6.	Write to Ofgem regarding figures on energy debt.	August 2023	Deputy Chief Executive
7.	Investigate why meetings of Preston Relief in Need have not been taking place.	Completed	Deputy Chief Executive

3. Background/ Aims of the Study

3.1 ^(OBJ)At the meeting held on 7 December 2022, the Committee considered the draft scoping document for the work plan study. Members discussed the immediate and long-term objectives and measures of undertaking the study whilst acknowledging the timescale and large scope. It was agreed that long term goals be considered at the end of the process.

The effect of the crisis on women was raised including rising costs and also financial restraints preventing victims from fleeing domestic abuse. The Committee resolved that women's groups be included in the interviewees.

The Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Community and Wellbeing reported on the round table event held on 9 November at the Gujarat Hindu Society Temple.

The Committee discussed the impact of the cost of living crisis on persons affected by disabilities and issues raised at the event. Ms Threlfall gave details of the Housing Support Fund (HSF) in Preston. The Council has £610k in the budget and has so far this year allocated £86k. The authority needs to identify and target disabled households whilst also raising awareness of this and others such as help with energy costs. Members acknowledged that some people had difficulty in accessing or completing forms and discussed how this can be addressed and publicised.

Ms Dunn, Community Asset Management Team, NHS reported on how those with mental health issues were being adversely affected by the crisis. She also reported on the financial and emotional effects on the bereaved including by suicide.

3.2 At the meeting held on 16 January 2023, Ms Nicole Billington, Head of Policy and External Relations, PCC and Ms Mel Close, Chief Executive, Disability Equality (NW) Ltd attended the meeting for interview in relation to the work plan study.

Ms Billington gave a presentation on the work from the Policy Team leading up to and following on from the Cost of Living Crisis event on 8 November 2022. Information on help available, including the Household Support Fund, has been produced in a variety of languages. The Authority has supported various other events including one to mark World Mental Health Day and another on Suicide Awareness Prevention.

In December 2022, a number of schemes were established viz:-

- Warmth and energy;
- Finance and Christmas;
- Debt and household bill;
- Mental Health Awareness.

The Group was given details of short videos which have been created for use on social media. It is planned that these will soon be added to TikTok. Members also discussed difficulties attaining grants for warm spaces and also attracting volunteers and food donations for community schemes.

Ms Close discussed the work of her organisation which supports disabled people across the Northwest aiming to support them and further their human rights. Many people are not accessing help and advice services needs more funding and staff to reach them. The Group discussed ways that the Council can improve services including:-

- Vulnerability training for frontline staff;
- Identifying people's needs on the system to improve communication;
- Review wording on letters and leaflets on Council Tax.

Ms Close suggested that the Council could work with cafes in the Market Hall and Bus Station to create a scheme for providing free drinks for financially vulnerable people.

3.3 Ms Denise Hartley MBE, Chief Executive Officer, Ingol and Tanterton Community Trust (Intact) and Mr David Barton and Mr Sean Greaves from OnSide attended the meeting for interview in relation to the work plan study.

Ms Hartley gave a presentation on the work of Intact. The organisation has 14 members of staff, 50 volunteer workers and eight trustees. A number of services are provided including:-

- Food pantry twice weekly used by up to 80 users who make a donation of £5;
- Café providing meals and also delivering cook and eat sessions;
- Mental health support through counselling;
- Digital inclusion;
- Work clubs;
- Sensory garden;
- Warm space.

Ms Hartley gave details of the opening of the centre and the successful application for a £100k grant from the Big Lottery Fund. Intact receives support from Fareshare and local supermarkets enabling it to provide meals and demonstrate cooking skills.

Members discussed ways to aid Intact including promotion through the Council's Communications Team, provide up to date contact information for external services and assist with access funding through the UK Prosperity Fund.

Mr Barton gave a presentation on the work of Onside, a national youth charity which builds youth zones in disadvantaged areas. The zone in Preston, subject to planning approval, will be located on the corner of Crooked Lane and

Tithebarn Street. The centre will have a variety of rooms with various activities. There will be a holiday club provision. Food will be provided at a subsidised cost and the fee for joining the centre will be £5pa.

The charity has learned that there is increased demand to learn life skills as well as have access to leisure facilities. Life skills such as cooking classes and using washing machines and driers will be available. The cost of living crisis is also affecting the mental health of young people. Funding will be sourced to increase access through free entry and the provision of meals. Transport barriers will also be explored closer to the launch date. The centre will be open to young persons aged 8 -19 or under 25 for those with disabilities.

The organisation will undertake a recruitment campaign before opening. There will also be soft openings whereby schools and organisations will be invited to visit and experience facilities and a partnership approach will be applied. Members highlighted the importance of linking with existing services and the inclusion of carers.

- 3.4 At the meeting held on 27 March, Ms Dot Halliwell, Manager, Farringdon Park Community Centre and Ms Valerie Wise, National Domestic Abuse Charity attended the meeting for interview in relation to the work plan study.

Ms Halliwell gave a presentation on the work of the Farringdon Park Community Centre which she has managed for seven years. The Centre runs various schemes weekly including:-

- Food hub;
- Breakfast club;
- Over 50s group;
- Youth club.

Ms Halliwell reported that the cost of living crisis was affecting the organisation. It was proving more difficult to obtain supplies from Fareshare for the food hub and to provide meals as demand increases.

Members asked how the Council could assist the Centre. Ms Halliwell replied that help with completing forms applying for funding was needed. The Centre also requires refurbishment including secondary glazing and roof insulation. The Deputy Chief Executive reported that there is funding for upgrading community facilities in the UK Prosperity Fund. She also reported that she would ensure assistance with grants and recruitment from The Community Engagement Team.

Ms Valerie Wise attended the meeting for interview in her capacity as an employee of a National Domestic Abuse Charity. Ms Wise reported on economic abuse, a legally recognised form of domestic abuse. This can involve access to technology such as phones and therefore affects a person's employment opportunities and subsequently the ability to leave an abusive situation.

The Committee were given details of Employers' Initiative on Domestic Abuse (EIDA) which the Council could use to develop a policy for staff. Members also discussed the effect of difficulty in accessing official documents when wishing to use a shelter.

3.5 At the meeting held on 24 April 2023, the Task and Finish Group considered the draft Work Plan Study on the Cost of Living. The Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Community and Wellbeing gave a presentation on developments on matters since the study commenced and on information relating to recommendations. This included:-

- Roll out of UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF)

The Group was informed that grant funding for phase one of the UKSPF funding has been agreed. Following feedback from community groups, the Council will focus on supporting the voluntary sector in the following areas:-

- Grant funding;
- Building and infrastructure;
- Sports and activities;
- Skills;
- Digital access.

Ms Threlfall reported that information videos and documents have been translated to make them more accessible. The Authority is particularly keen to reach those with disabilities who had received no funding to date from national programmes. The Council will make more support available to those already working with most vulnerable enabling the direct provision of vouchers and support with energy. The Authority will continue work on food support.

There will be additional staff resourced to deliver HSF funding to speed up applications and ensure that the Council has the capacity to support increasing levels of debt and financial vulnerability.

All Councillors have been provided with a briefing note on how to access Household Support. The issue of financial control and coercion is being specifically looked at together with support for women impacted by violence.

- Information and Training

Council Tax Bills and reminder notices have been updated as requested by the Group with the aim of encouraging people to take up support on offer. An analysis will be undertaken to identify issues in order to provide more support to those who are struggling.

Training on vulnerability together with data collection is ongoing. A policy and training programme will be produced in June.

- Other Issues

Work with young people has been identified as a programme of work in its own right. Events are planned for the new Municipal Year bringing together providers to identify priorities and gaps in provision for young people.

The Council is also looking at options around:-

- Support for those affected by suicide;
- Digital access for the most vulnerable (likely through the UKSPF);
- Access and recruitment relating to the Youth Zone;
- Debt advice relating to Council Tax arrears.

It was agreed to seek information from LCC regarding warm spaces and also ICT provision in libraries. It was further agreed to write to Ofgem regarding figures on energy debt.

The Deputy Chief Executive agreed to investigate why meetings of Preston Relief in Need have not been taking place.

The study was approved to be submitted to CMT.

4. Further Evidence

4.1 Representations were sought from Preston College as an invitee was unable to attend a meeting of the Task and Finish Group. The college provides support to students in many areas including:-

- Laptop provision;
- Food bank;
- Access to period products and contraception.

The college receive funding for the Period Poverty Service from the Department for Education. More resources, however, are needed to provide further ICT support to students.

Corporate Management Team Comments

Financial

~~Legal There are no legal implications arising from the~~

Cabinet Response

That the Cabinet, having considered the comments of the Council's Corporate Management Team, accepted and approved the recommendations set out in the Work Plan Study report on the Cost of Living.

Appendix A

Cost of living work Plan Study-Scoping Document

Scope

The study will consider the implications of the Cost-of-Living Crisis for Communities in Preston, including how the Council should work in partnership with other organisations to:

- Agree how we can collectively support the most vulnerable;

- Understand perspectives from those who, like our own agencies are working on the front line in supporting the most vulnerable;
- Hear from agencies about their challenges, who they are seeing impacted and how and how they are responding;
- Build on the work already happening to support the most vulnerable and look at how we can scale up our collective response;
- Consider how we tackle fragility and inequality in the longer term- helping those on the margin to move beyond poverty and insecurity and enable them to thrive and prosper in a city which places fairness and supporting the vulnerable at the heart of its plans.

1a.	Cllr Hindle	Contact Details 07518 045538 cllr.a.hindle@preston.gov.uk
1b.	Member Services Officer Ms J Pollock Scrutiny Support Manager	Ext: 6305 j.pollock@preston.gov.uk
1c.	Departmental Link Officer: Sarah Threlfall Deputy Chief Executive Community Engagement Manager	Ext: 3438 sarah.threlfall@preston.gov.uk
2.	<p>Which of our Corporate Priorities does this topic address?</p> <p><u>Corporate Plan</u></p> <p><u>Your City-</u> Improving assets and infrastructure.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Protect individuals and communities from the impact of the Cost-of-Living Crisis and its harmful effects, including housing insecurity and debt and access to basic essentials. <p><u>Your Council</u> – Demonstrating good governance, openness and transparency</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Work in partnership to reduce the harm caused by the cost-of-living crisis and its associated factors to individuals and communities. ➤ Provide transparency and openness in measures taken protect individuals against the cost-of-living crisis. 	

	<p><u>Fairness For You</u> - An economy supporting prosperity and promoting fairness in working lives and practices.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Enabling people to move beyond financial insecurity and instability to thriving and prospering in a fair and equal society which supports the most vulnerable.
3.	<p>What are the overall aims and objectives in doing this work?</p> <p>The work plan study will consider the impact of the cost of living on the most vulnerable in Preston having regard to:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) Financial support including benefits take up and access to responsible lenders; (ii) Access to immediate and emergency support and the transition into longer term financial sustainability; (iii) Insight and intelligence around how to identify and target those most vulnerable with support and effective communication (iv) What support is available to those who are experiencing housing insecurity or homelessness <p>The work plan study, due to the urgent nature of the crisis, will commence immediately and undertake focused work over a period of three months. Meeting in December 2022, January 2023 and February 2023.</p> <p>Any recommendations which are relevant and can be agreed within current delegations of the supporting officer and within existing resources will be implemented as soon as possible without the need to wait for a final report.</p> <p>The meeting in December will consider the output from the COL event with a focus on support for those with disabilities and key recommendations. The meeting will hear directly from people with disabilities impacted by the crisis and</p> <p>The meeting in January will focus on support for young people. The meeting will take evidence form young people and their representatives as well as providers who may be able to support young people who are struggling.</p>

	<p>The meeting in February will consider support in communities including access to food and will hear directly from community group representatives and members of the food network.</p> <p>The meeting in March will consolidate all learning to date and consider the longer-term response to those who are struggling to access essentials and support in our communities.</p> <p>The work of the Group will be submitted to Cabinet.</p>
4.	<p>Possible outputs/outcomes to this review are:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) greater understanding of the impact of the cost-of-living crisis on the most vulnerable and how best to target support and information at these individuals and households; (ii) greater understanding of the detrimental effects and consequences for individuals and communities and how to work with other organisations to provide resilience and protection; (iii) more effective intervention to support people in moving beyond the immediate crisis into more sustainable housing, employment and support models; (iv) recommendations for additional local measures which will enable all those with a role to play in supporting the most vulnerable through the cost-of-living crisis to become more effective
5.	<p>What specific value can Scrutiny add to this work area?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To provide an opportunity for the Members to discuss the issues with stakeholders, including those being directly impacted by the cost-of-living crisis, community representatives and other anchor organisations 2. To support the consideration and implementation of measures following the Cost-of-Living event on the 8th of November
6.	<p>Duration of the Review?</p> <p>3 months approximately</p>
7.	<p>What category does the review fall into?</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Housing Associations and support providers;➤ Lancashire County Council Public Health Team➤ Schools and further education providers;➤ Charitable and Voluntary Organisations Including Community Groups and Food Banks and other Food Providers➤ Representatives of those most vulnerable to the impact of the cost of living➤ Financial Support Providers (e.g. Clver Money, Lancashire Community Finance)	information about the support available
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10.	<p>What processes can we use to feed into the review (site visits/observations, face to face questioning, telephone surveys, written questionnaires etc)?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Face to face interviews with the parties invited to provide evidence; • Statistical data and analysis relating to Cost of Living and associated factors affecting Preston; • Legislation and guidance from Home Office, Local Government Association and other reliable sources. • Site visits to community organisations supporting the most vulnerable
11.	<p>Diversity – How will we address the diversity standards in order to uphold the Council’s Single Equality Scheme?</p> <p>The scope of the review will take into account the extent to which the Cost of Living Crisis impacts upon families and individuals in the community and these may differ according to age, gender, sexual identity, disability and ethnicity.</p> <p>The draft recommendations will have an equality impact assessment.</p>