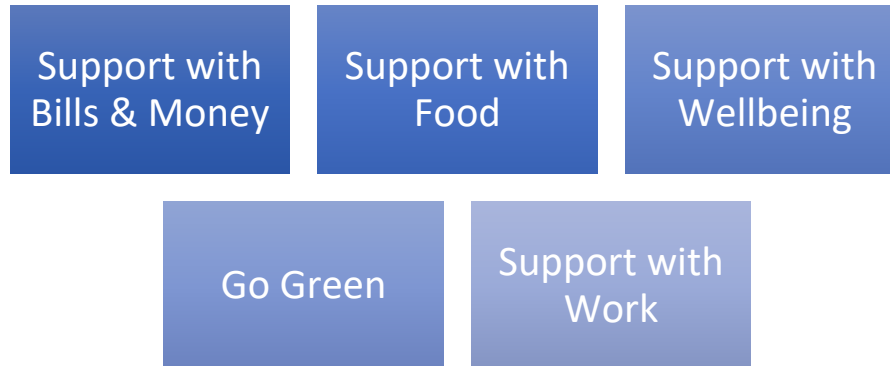




Cost of Living Action Plan



As the Country prepares for the impacts of the cost of living crisis both Councils are focused on our response in order to support our staff, residents and businesses. We have developed our response around 5 key themes:



This Action Plan provides a whole system approach to support residents, businesses and staff respond to the cost-of-living issues and enable individual and collective support through a suite of preventative and personalized measures.

This action plan is a live document and will be informed not only from any governmental changes but also a number of sources., such as health colleagues, Housing, Revs and Bens, DWP, CAB and VCSE organisations that are on the front-line providing services to residents.

Although a number of services were digitized as a result of Covid, we also need to make sure that the most vulnerable know how to access the support services that are available to them which may include printed support material or face to face engagement. The following groups are particularly affected: Single people on low incomes (on benefits or in work); Families with children, including lone parents: Those living with disabilities: and Pensioners.

Both Council already provide core funding to organisations such as Citizens Advice and others to ensure that it continues to support people. This compliments current housing/welfare support provision.

This action plan will be regularly presented to Members across both Council's for review.



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Support with bills and money						
	Task	Lead (dept)	Assigned to	Timeframe	Cost & Funding Source	Benefit and potential Impact
B1	Residents that are eligible for Council Tax Energy Rebate of £150 receive it: Bands A-D	Revenues and Benefits	Director of Resources	22/23	Funding from Central Government	Residents can use relief to offset against other living standard issues
B2	Energy rebate	Revenues and Benefits	Director of Resources	22/23	Funding from Government	The scheme is universal, meaning all domestic electricity customers will get £400 off their energy bills from October. It will be paid per property, so even those with multiple properties and holiday homes will receive a £400 rebate on each bill, The rebate is administered by the energy companies directly. Those households on the lowest income will receive an extra payment of £650 to help with the cost of living.
B3	Household Support Fund to support residents against the following categories (Food, Clothing and utilities)	Revenues and Benefits	Director of Resources	22/23	ECC	The fund will help households with the cost of essentials such as food, clothing and utilities (where there is specific need identified).
B4	Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) to support those whose rent is restricted due to Local Housing Allowance, Bedroom Tax or Benefit Cap	Revenues and Benefits	Director of Resources/ Director of Housing?	22/23	TBC	DHP can help people with housing costs including those affected by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Benefit cap • Removal of spare room subsidy in social rented sector(?) • Local Housing allowance (LHA) rates You may get a DHP to cover housing costs:



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						<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where there is a liability to pay rent and rent shortfall exists after Housing Benefit or Universal Credit (UC) Housing Costs are paid and the Household budget is insufficient to meet that shortfall • For a short period to allow time for household adjustments to contracts and subscriptions • To facilitate a move that removes ongoing dependency on DHP <p>DHPs cannot cover Council Tax or rent arrears</p>
B5	Council Tax Reduction Scheme offers up to 75% reduction in Council Tax for low income working age residents and 100% reduction for pension age residents	Revenues and Benefits	Director of Resources	Ongoing	Subject to eligibility	Supports working people on low income that may require support and also pension age residents who meet the criteria for eligibility
B6	Brentwood - New Community Engagement Officer shared with Basildon Borough Council for 2 years (pending decision by PRED- Separate report)	Revenues and Benefits	Director of Resources (\$151 Officer)	22-24	BBC contribution £36.5k (over 2 years)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key technical knowledge on Universal Credit, Housing Benefit, Council Tax Reduction, and Discretionary Housing Payment new claims, which will give assistance for those who genuinely are unable to help themselves. • Give advice on Welfare Benefits, Housing Benefit, Council Tax Reduction/Support – ensuring customers are claiming for what they may be entitled to. • Assistance with Homelessness and Housing options.



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						<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assist in improving customers employability & getting them ready for, or back to work • Organise follow up support for specialist issues from different agencies relating to mental health and debts advice • Drug and Alcohol dependency support • Training to other members of staff within the Council <p>It is intended that this officer will be available across the borough, in key locations.</p>
B7	Dedicated webpage for Cost of Living to support and signpost our residents, staff and businesses	Community Services	Director of Communities and Health	Ongoing	Within existing budgets	<p>The webpages are live and covers five key themes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support with money and bills • Support with Food • Support with wellbeing • Go Green • Support with work <p>All information will be regularly reviewed and updated</p>
B8	Working Group to be established with internal Council departments and key external partners to identify and support our residents, staff and businesses	Community Services	Director of Communities and Health	Ongoing	Within existing budgets	<p>A joint working group will be established for both Councils and will include representatives from Community Services, Housing, Revs and Bens, Communications and Customer Contact Centre. In addition, the working group will work with key partners such as Essex County Fire and Rescue, Brentwood and Basildon Alliance, Rochford and Castlepoint Alliance, Essex Police, CAB and other voluntary sector partners. This</p>



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						working group will help to identify any additional resources required in order to provide targeted support for residents and businesses.
B9	Cost of Living Earmarked Reserve (Brentwood)	Finance	Director of Resources	22/23	Earmarked reserve £100,000	To set aside funds to address any additional internal resources identified by the Cost of Living Working Group
B10	Housing Options Officers support each tenant individually, looking at their situation holistically and not just rent owed. They work with other agencies such as Citizens Advice or Peabody to help to maximise income, better budgeting and negotiating with creditors. This could also utilize the Household Support Grant	Housing/ Finance	Director of Housing	22/23	Within existing budgets	Council officers continue to provide holistic support/early intervention to prevent people from falling into debt or at risk of homelessness. This will be enhanced by partnership working with CAB and Peabody to signpost support available. Work with Revenues and Benefits and Housing departments to look at analytics to stop people going into debt.
B11	Additional support materials for Cost of living to be developed through the Working Group	Community Services	Director of Communities and Health	2022/23	Within existing budgets	Supports different communication methods so that we ensure that any information is widely available as much as possible in different format so that we do not exclude those with no digital access. However, we need to bear in mind that information may be subject to change.
B12	Utilising any outreach opportunities such the Community Connect trailer to provide face to face signposting, support and advice	Community Services/ Housing	Director of Communities and Health	22/23	Within existing budgets	Working with Parish and Town Councils and partners to fully utilise any assets that can provide additional outreach opportunities



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B13	Training for frontline staff	Revenues and Benefits/ Community Services/ Contact Centre and Housing	Director of Communities and Health	2022/23	ECC	With funding provided by Essex County Council CAB has been commissioned to provide dedicated training to frontline staff to support them when dealing with cost-of-living issues. This will also provide additional support for those who may not be able to access online services and guidance
B14	Survey Community Support Network & communities to understand impact of Cost-of-Living Crisis at a hyper local level	Communities and Health	Director of Communities and Health	22/23	Existing BBC budget	The survey will help inform the local impact and identify where and what support will be required.
Existing H&WB work to engage residents					Survey to be led by board and partners such as the hub for RDC	
B15	Scoping of data with partner organisations to understand which residents may require multi-agency support	Contact Centre/ Community Services/ Revenues and Benefits/ Housing	Director of Communities and Health	22/23	Existing budgets	Survey undertaken with Community Support Network including CAB and CVS and Cost-of Living Working Group
B16	Pensioner support	Revenues and Benefits	Director of Resources	22/23	Funding from Central Government	There will be an extra cost of living payment for pensioners. Pensioner households who receive the winter fuel payment will get £300. If you receive pension credit, you can get £650 one-off payment on top of this £300, as well as the £400 energy bill rebate.



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						<p>This means a low-income pensioner household will receive a total of £1,500 this year in extra support.</p> <p>This extra £300 payment is designed to help households who are disproportionately affected by higher energy costs.</p>
B17	National insurance payments	N/A				<p>The Government has reversed the 1.25% increase to employer and employee National Insurance Contributions (NICs) in this financial year and dropped the Health and Social Care Levy that was due to succeed it in 2023-24.</p>
B18	Support for businesses	Economic Development	Director of Place	22/23	Funding tbc.	<p>Identify any funding that is available to businesses and identify additional support required.</p>
B19	Consult local businesses to establish support required	Economic Development	Director of Place	22/23	Within existing resources	<p>Undertake a survey of local businesses with Brentwood Business Partnership to ascertain additional support.</p>

Support with Food and Essentials						
Task	Lead (department)	Assigned to	Timeframe	Cost & Funding Source	Benefit and potential Impact `	



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F1	Work with Active Essex and ECC (Essex County Council) to continue to provide the Holiday Activities and Food Programme (HAF) during the school holidays for children and young people	Communities	Director of Community and Health	22/23	DFE via ECC / Active Essex	The school holidays can be pressure points for some families. The HAF programme which provides free activities and meals during school holidays to young people who are eligible for free school meals. The HAF programme provides a positive impact on children and young people
F2	Map any green spaces and allotments (working with Parish Council's) to identify sites that can bring communities together to grow their own produce- reinvest in initiatives that have been successful which can be repeated elsewhere through the use of community grants/civic crowdfunding platform	Communities & Environment	Director of Communities and Health Director of Environment	Ongoing	Discretionary Funding	Utilising both Council's green spaces supports mental and physical health. Some projects are funded through VSG and PH grants each year to support activities in communities, some in green spaces. RDC rents out many green spaces for sports.
F3	Maximise funding to local foodbanks, Foodshare and identify locations for possible community fridges	Community Services	Director of Communities and Health	Ongoing	Government funding allocated (tbc)	Support residents to access food support in the borough which will be informed by the Cost-of-Living Working Group



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F4	Work with Communities across both Council's to provide assets that can be utilised to support local residents to cook cheap and healthy meals	Community Services	Director of Communities and Health	Ongoing	Funding TBC	Work with Children's Centre, Manna Meals, and CVS to identify families that would benefit from additional support.
					PH Funding RDC	PH funding is regularly provided to projects under the outcomes of the CP&R H&WB strategy to projects such as man with a pan
F5	Work with partners such as Lighthouse furniture Company to maximise, reduce and reuse of materials and the Essential Living Fund funding	Community Services	Director of Communities and Health	22/23	ECC/ Brentwood Community Fund	Support residents on low incomes to access furniture at low cost

Support with Wellbeing						
Task	Lead (department)	Assigned to	Timeframe	Cost & Funding Source	Benefit and potential Impact	



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W1	Work with our partner agencies to support the most vulnerable residents	Community Services	Director of Communities and Health	22/23	Brentwood Community Funded projects Core funding to CAB and CVS	Work with the VCSE organisations to signpost and support mental health and wellbeing and build community resilience. Utilise the Community Support Network and Hub developments to identify and support our more vulnerable residents.
W2	The Council with partners to promote a range of community engagement events to provide positive engagement and participation	Community Services	Director of Communities and Health	22/23	Within existing budgets	Utilising the Community Connect Trailer in more rural areas, Community Events, and other community engagement days to extend the reach to our residents. Working alongside our partners to realise opportunities such as local events etc.
						Budgets for this and resources would need to be identified for RDC.
W3	Promote the community Physical and Mental Health and wellbeing projects through our partners such as the local Health and Wellbeing Boards and our Leisure Service providers	Community Services	Director of Communities and Health	22/23	Within existing budgets or through Brentwood Community Fund, funded projects	Supports the borough's more vulnerable residents to lead more healthy lifestyles.



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					Within the work of H&WBB and partners in Rochford & contract for Leisure services	Supports the borough's more vulnerable residents to lead more healthy lifestyles in line with the priorities for the CP&R Health and Wellbeing Strategy https://www.rochford.gov.uk/community-and-people/health-and-wellbeing/castle-point-rochford-health-and-wellbeing-strategy-2022 The mental Health Concordat and the livewell work https://www.rochford.gov.uk/community-and-people/health-and-wellbeing/live-well-link-well
W4	Continue to support staff through the Employee Assistance programme	HR	Director of Law and Governance	22/23	Within existing budgets	Support staff through the Employee Assistance Programme www.vivupbenefits.co.uk RDC Livewell channel
W5	Promote activities across both Council's where residents can go ensuring buildings are fit for purpose	Community Services	Director of Communities and Health	Ongoing	Within existing budgets	Supports resident's mental health and social wellbeing at hyper local level utilizing existing community support network and the activities that they provide at their support hubs. This is linked to the warmer spaces.
W6	Work with partners to promote Winter Warmth campaign and establish small working group	Community Services	Director of Communities and Health	22/23	ECC funding to CVS	Small working group to allocate funding across the borough for projects to support residents.
	Development of warm spaces/hubs (welcome hubs) in order to reduce stigma associated with fuel poverty	Community Services	Director of Communities and health	Ongoing	Potential Health/ECC funding	There is a countywide mapping exercise being undertaken by anchor organisations such as Districts, Borough, ECC and Health to ascertain which assets can be utilised to provide these warm spaces. The Council is not intending to create additional sites but to utilise the existing



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						spaces which meet the criteria where there is support already provided.
W7	County wide summit to address cost of living crisis	Community Services	Director of Communities and health	November 2022	N/A	To understand the wider implications of the cost of living crisis.

Go Green						
	Task	Lead (department)	Assigned to	Timeframe	Cost & Funding Source	Benefit and potential Impact
G1	Promote the green spaces across both Councils as places where people can meet to	Parks and Open Spaces	Director of Environment	22/23	Within existing budgets	Supports physical and mental health and wellbeing of residents



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	support physical health and wellbeing					
G2	Promote the use of allotments and work with the local horticultural societies in the development of spaces.	Parks and Open Spaces	Director of Environment	22/23	Within existing budgets	Supports residents to grow their own and reduce their food bills where possible and signpost
G3	Promotion and development of community orchards	Parks and Open spaces	Director of Environment	22/23	Within existing budgets	Allows communities to access free fruit
G4	Retrofit of residential properties	Housing (tenants)	Director of Housing	Ongoing	ECC/ LAD funding	Assists residents to retrofit properties to reduce their utility costs. Work with Essex County Council Warmer Homes programme, which helps Essex residents to save energy and reduce their bills. This can include home improvements, financial help and tips on energy saving. Work with approved providers on the longer-term retrofit programme for the Council's housing stock. Continue the programme to build zero-carbon homes in the borough.
G5	Work with ECC to promote the Warmer Homes programme of support that is available	Housing/ Environmental Health	Director of Environment	Ongoing	ECC funding	Assists residents to retrofit their own properties to reduce their utility costs
G6	Identify approved support services to provide free energy advice	Community Services	Director of Communities and health	22/23	Within existing budgets	To provide a free service that assists residents in keeping warm and reducing their energy bills, without costing them any money.
G7	Approve the Environmental Strategy	Director of Environment	Director of Environment	Ongoing	Within existing budgets	Identify energy efficiencies and reducing carbon output and green incentives.



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Support with work						
	Task	Lead (department)	Assigned to	Timeframe	Cost & Funding Source	Benefit and potential Impact
S1	Work with Department of Works and Pensions and Job Centre Plus support	Revenues and Benefits	Director of Resources	Ongoing	Government Funding	Provide advice and support to help you work such as funded childcare vouchers, Jobseekers Allowance, Employment and Support Allowance when you start work.