



Safer Stronger Communities Select Committee

Report title: Cost of Living crisis – programme update and equalities screening

Date: 17 January 2023

Key decision: No

Ward(s) affected: All

Contributors: Catherine Mbema, Director of Public Health; Pinaki Ghoshal, Executive Director for Children and Young People, Gemma King, Cost of Living programme manager

Outline and recommendations

Members of the Committee are asked to:

Note work / actions / outputs to date and next steps in relation to Cost of Living (CoL) programme

Note equalities screening in relation to the CoL crisis and future approach.

Timeline of engagement and decision-making

- Overview and Scrutiny Committee – 21st September 2022
- Full Council – 28th September 2022
- EMT 2 November 2022
- Cabinet Briefing 22 November 2022
- Safer Stronger Communities Select Committee 17 January 2023
- Local Strategic Partnership 30 January 2023
- The cost-of-living research task group and derivative workstream working groups will continue to meet into summer 2023

1. Summary

1.1. The cost-of-living crisis is having severe detrimental effects on households across the

country, and Lewisham residents are particularly vulnerable given comparatively low incomes and high deprivation levels.

- 1.2. A programme of action has been developed to support residents through the crisis - utilising existing resources, securing funding from identified sources (internal and external) to support delivery, and enhancing partnership work across the borough with the voluntary community sector and anchor institutions.
- 1.3. National data already suggests that the crisis is amplifying existing inequalities, therefore it is imperative that our response considers the effect of the crisis on protected characteristic groups and adapts interventions to ensure that the most vulnerable residents can access support.
- 1.4. This report and accompanying papers give an overview of work to date, analyses effects of the crisis on underserved and underrepresented groups and sets out a commitment to plan interventions that aim to target and support the most vulnerable residents in the most need, whilst ensuring that all residents are signposted to the most appropriate solutions.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 To note work / actions / outputs to date and next steps in relation to Cost of Living programme
- 2.2 To note equalities screening in relation to the COL crisis and future approach.

3. Policy Context

3.1 This report aligns with Lewisham's Corporate Priorities, as set out in the Council's [Corporate Strategy \(2022-2026\)](#):

- 3.1.1 Cleaner and Greener
- 3.1.2 A Strong Local Economy
- 3.1.3 Quality Housing
- 3.1.4 Children and Young People
- 3.1.5 Safer Communities
- 3.1.6 Open Lewisham
- 3.1.7 Health and Wellbeing

3.2 In particular this report is closely aligned to priorities:

- 3.2.1 A future we all have a part in (Future Lewisham, 2021)
- 3.2.2 Open Lewisham (Lewisham Council Corporate Strategy, 2022)

4. Background

- 4.1. The cost of living has been increasing across the UK since early 2021. The annual rate of inflation was the highest it has been since 1982 in July 2022, affecting the affordability of goods and services for households. This is a national issue facing all parts of the UK, arising from several national and international factors.
- 4.2. Lewisham residents are affected by the crisis through these changes in general economic circumstance, as well as the secondary effects of such changes, which may include changes in employment. Data shows that Lewisham residents are particularly vulnerable: salaries are comparatively low, and deprivation comparatively high

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compared to other central London Boroughs.

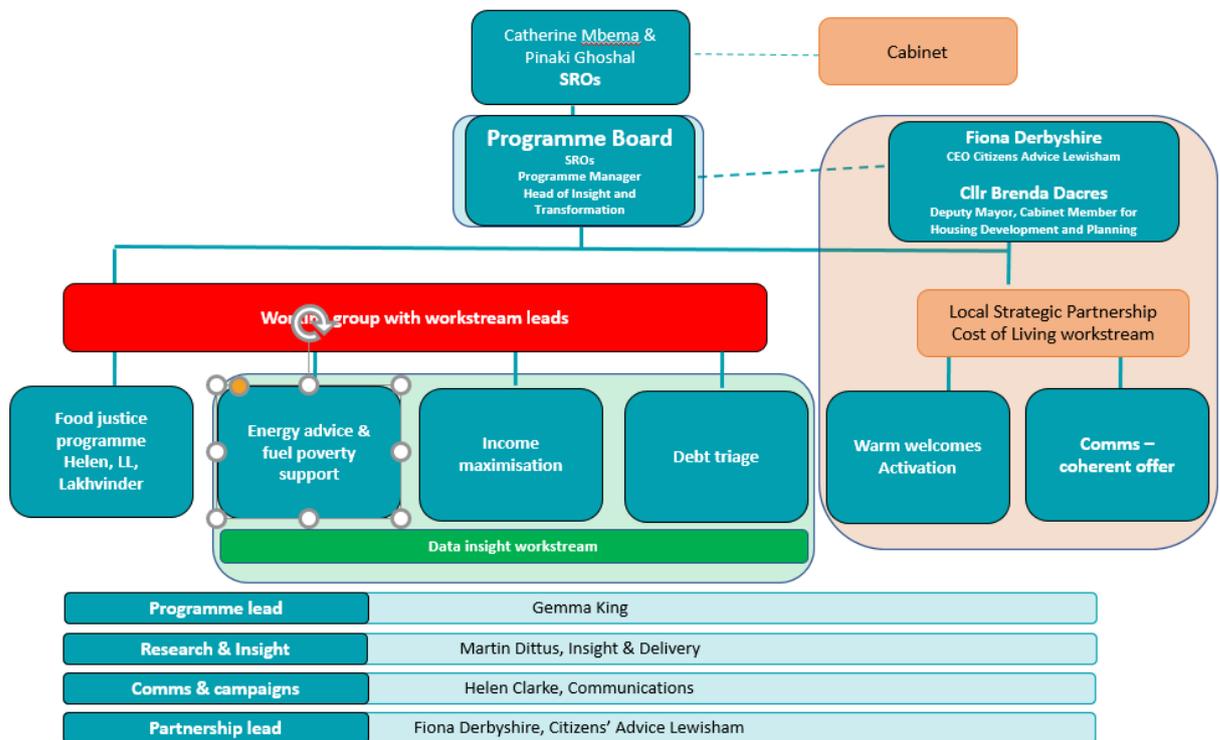
4.3. The Council’s response to this crisis is proportionate given the current financial constraints and the need to make budget cuts. As requested by the Executive Management Team, a research task group was convened in spring 2022, made up of key services from across the organisation, with an objective to identify key issues of concern affecting residents or services. A programme of deliverable actions has been developed to address these concerns, themed under the following workstreams:

- 4.3.1. Food justice programme
- 4.3.2. Energy advice & fuel poverty support
- 4.3.3. Income maximisation
- 4.3.4. Debt triage
- 4.3.5. Warm welcomes
- 4.3.6. Communications

4.4. The accompanying slide pack includes an update of work under each workstream.

5. Governance

5.1. The work is overseen by internal SROs Catherine Mbema (Director of Public Health) and Pinaki Ghoshal (Executive Director for Children and Young People). Additionally, the partnership-led aspects of the programme are being overseen through the Local Strategic Partnership, chaired by Fiona Derbyshire (CEO, Citizens Advice Lewisham) and Cllr Brenda Dacres (Deputy Mayor, Cabinet Member for Housing, Development and Planning). See governance model illustration below:



6. Equalities

6.1. The cost-of-living crisis is an accumulation of short- and long-term changes in general circumstance, including an increase in the cost of housing; varied indirect effects of the Coronavirus pandemic including changes in employment, health and wellbeing, care

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arrangements; changes in energy cost, interest rates, and inflation; and others. These create a circumstance where a growing number of households are struggling to meet basic living expenses.

- 6.2. At the time of this review, we estimate that all service users (and all Lewisham residents) are affected by the crisis through these changes in general economic circumstance, as well as the secondary effects of such changes, which may include changes in employment. We believe Lewisham residents are particularly vulnerable: salaries are comparatively low, and deprivation comparatively high compared to other central London Boroughs.
- 6.3. We can already see clear indicators for a shift in our residents' financial well-being, for example a doubling of Universal Credit claimants since early 2020, and a significant increase in the use of local food banks. In November 2022, Citizens Advice Lewisham reported a 390% increase in clients who called for advice about a fuel debt compared to the previous year, and a 275% increase in redeeming of fuel vouchers (these are handed out at food banks.)
- 6.4. In London, a recent GLA survey showed that 18% of Londoners are already financially "struggling or going without". This is particularly pronounced among respondents of Black ethnicity, people not in employment and people of below-average household income, private renters and social renters, and people whose activities are limited due to health or disability. At national level it is observed that inflation has had clear disproportionate impacts on lower-income households, including an increase in absolute poverty.
- 6.5. As a result of these factors, we expect that without targeted intervention, the crisis will amplify existing inequalities in the Borough, and create new inequalities.
- 6.6. A central aim of the programme is to deliver a programme of work that serve to limit these unequal effects. For example, by identifying vulnerable groups and individuals and ensuring they make use of any available benefits and other support.
- 6.7. Due to the wide breadth of the overall programme, the programme team have completed an equalities screening template, reviewing the impact of the crisis on each protected characteristic, both nationally and locally, where data is available.
- 6.8. It is proposed that the impacts of the wider crisis and Lewisham contextual information are considered for each CoL programme intervention by service planning stakeholders. All interventions should ensure that those most vulnerable to the cost-of-living crisis are considered and targeted in delivery. Interventions should be inclusive both in how they are accessed and who can access them. Work already underway seeks to support groups disproportionately impacted by the crisis and some of this is explored in the accompanying screening template.
- 6.9. It should also be referenced that some interventions may target a specific vulnerable group and therefore be exclusive to a certain protected cohort with sound reasoning (e.g., a warm space held at a women's aid venue should naturally be limited to women as a safe refuge).

7. Financial implications

- 7.1. There are no financial implications arising directly from this report.

8. Legal implications

- 8.1. There are no legal implications arising directly from this report.

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9. Equalities implications

9.1. Equalities considerations are detailed in the attached *Equalities Screening Template*.

10. Climate change and environmental implications

10.1. There are no climate implications arising directly from this report.

11. Crime and disorder implications

11.1. There are no crime and disorder implications arising directly from this report. [Type here, Arial size 11]

12. Health and wellbeing implications

12.1. The data explored in the equalities screening demonstrates clear detrimental links between the cost-of-living crisis and health / wellbeing factors for vulnerable Lewisham residents.

12.2. The governance of the programme includes direct reporting to the council's Local Strategic Partnership, with an objective of ensuring maximum information sharing, collaborative ideas, and creating a 'cohesive offer' where residents will be appropriately signposted, whatever service they use. This partnership includes anchor health institutions such as the NHS, SLAM, and representatives of GP networks.

12.3. The programme is also overseen by Dr Catherine Mbema, Director of Public Health, to ensure that health implications are considered in programme outputs.

13. Report author(s) and contact

13.1. Martin Dittus, Data and Insight Lead Cost of Living Programme

13.2. Gemma King, Programme Manager Cost of Living

13.3. Catherine Mbema, Director of Public Health

14. Appendices

14.1. Cost of living programme update slide pack

14.2. Cost of living programme equalities screening template

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