



Cost-of-living support to date

Maximising resources to support residents facing financial uncertainty and hardship



Background

The country has been experiencing a cost-of-living crisis since late 2021. Many Lewisham residents are particularly vulnerable to the crisis due to relatively low incomes and higher deprivation. In 2019/20, 35% of people in the borough lived in households with an income of less than 60% the UK average (median), after housing costs. This was worse than the average London Borough (Trust for London, 2023).

Cost-of-living programme

Given the urgent nature of the crisis, a suite of cost-of-living responses was set up, using internal and external resource and expertise. We've delivered this work with council staff, voluntary and community sector partners, and local anchor institutions.

The programme team have capitalised on available resources, including the four Household Support Fund iterations, to deliver support to residents facing crisis, and to prevent existing crises from deepening. The team have also expanded strategic partnerships within and outside the council to maximise the ability to respond.

Work to date and impacts

Food poverty and hunger

- We've invested over £4.5m over the lifetime of the Household Support Fund to expand Free School Meals (FSM) into the school holidays, supporting over 10,000 children
- We've used over £3m of Household Support Fund to support over 17,000 children from low-income families where they don't meet the threshold for FSM
- We've distributed £1.3m of the Household Support Fund to schools, who have allocated the money quickly and effectively through breakfasts, snacks, packed-lunch top-ups, food parcels and feeding children not eligible for FSM
- We've invested £150k in school infrastructure to make sure schools were able to deliver the Mayor of London's universal free school meal provision for primary schools 2023-24
- We've spent £200k to extend the Department for Education's holiday food and fun programme for children in receipt of FSM
- We've invested over £200k of Public Health and local area NHS funding into our food justice programme, aimed at combatting food insecurity in Lewisham. This money also funded a community grant scheme, delivered by voluntary and community partners. The grants have helped local food-giving projects (such as foodbanks, social supermarkets, community pantries and delivery services) to meet the increasing demand brought about by the cost-of-living crisis.

Energy advice and fuel poverty support

- We've funded community energy partners £300k to deliver practical support to households facing fuel poverty, exacerbated by the energy crisis. This support has included warm packs, financial support through grants and vouchers, help with energy debts and improvements to heating systems. In 2022-23 this programme, along with the South London Healthy Homes programme, helped over 1150 households.

Maximising incomes

- We've helped residents to maximise their incomes by investing in local advice services to increase capacity and locations. Almost £370k, funded through the Household Support Fund and Public Health, has enabled advice partners to support an additional 1550 clients, with income gains of almost £500k to date
- In partnership with Policy in Practice, we've proactively contacted over 1,200 households to increase uptake of Pension Credit, leading to an additional annual income of up to £1.6m for 444 households
- Our Jobs and Skills team have funded employment support partners with £75k to help residents experiencing in-work poverty to improve their employment situation through higher wages and / or more secure hours. The programme is supporting 50 residents to date, and participants are reporting increased incomes, enhanced skills, increased confidence or completion of an accredited qualification.

Support through hardship

- We've invested almost £140k into a small grant scheme for essential items, delivered by our voluntary and community partners. The grants allow residents facing hardship to purchase items that can make a real difference, such as white goods, computers, ID documents, bicycles and more
- We've given out over £3m of Household Support Fund in cash payments to support residents most affected by the cost-of-living crisis. We've made these payments to thousands of households at risk of hardship, including those in receipt of benefits but not entitled to central government cost-of-living payments.

Warm Welcomes

- We've used funding from local health partners to deliver a Warm Welcomes programme for the last two winters, in partnership with voluntary and community sector groups. Warm Welcomes are spaces like community centres, libraries and faith groups that offer free drop-in spaces, refreshments, social activities, and additional support. In winter 2022-23, 52 x Warm Welcomes spaces supported an estimated 10,000+ visitors. 84% of surveyed users found that the spaces helped them feel more connected and reduced social isolation, in addition to keeping them warm.



Targeting support

- We used data across several services to identify over 500 families potentially eligible for Pupil Premium funding and FSM. Through auto-enrolment we have created an additional £1.2m additional funding for schools across the borough
- We're investing around £90k in data systems and infrastructure to help us better reach vulnerable residents and help them to access the support they need.

- We've worked with colleagues and partners to promote support available across the borough, with printed posters and leaflets, our [cost-of-living webpage](#), and cost-of-living roadshows which we hope to continue over winter.

Questions? Please contact gemma.king@lewisham.gov.uk