

Meeting date: 14 March 2023

Report to: Health and Wellbeing Board

Report title: Solihull's response to the Cost-of-Living Pressures

Report from: Alison McGrory Assistant Director Communities and Partnerships
– amcgrory@solihull.gov.uk

Report author/lead contact officer: Sarah Barnes – Head of Business Intelligence and Improvement

Wards affected:

- All Wards | Bickenhill | Blythe | Castle Bromwich | Chelmsley Wood |
 Dorridge/Hockley Heath | Elmdon | Kingshurst/Fordbridge | Knowle |
 Lyndon | Meriden | Olton | Shirley East | Shirley South |
 Shirley West | Silhill | Smith's Wood | St Alphege
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Public/private report: Public

Exempt by virtue of paragraph:

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 To update the Health and Wellbeing Board on Solihull's response to the current cost-of-living pressures.

2. Decision(s) recommended

2.1 Health and Wellbeing Board Members are asked to:

- Review and comment on the last three months of data collected on the cost-of-living pressures dashboard, which can be seen at Appendix 1.
- Note the latest feedback from Voluntary and Community Sector Groups which is summarised at Appendix 2.

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3. Matters for Consideration

- 3.1 The rising cost of energy, food and other essentials are combining with existing disadvantage and vulnerability within our communities to put more households at greater risk of both immediate hardship and reduced opportunity and wellbeing.
- 3.2 There are a range of subsequent impacts that can be anticipated on the physical and mental health of households, which are likely to increase the number of excess winter deaths, lead to the deterioration of existing health conditions (e.g. respiratory and cardiovascular), as well as increase demand on the social care and health system.
- 3.3 With our partners, working alongside our community, we will continue to do what we can to support people by targeting help at those facing the most complex challenges. It is hoped that this will help to alleviate some immediate hardship that households may face, as well as help to reduce and prevent anticipated demands on statutory services.

4. What options have been considered and what is the evidence telling us about them?

- 4.1 To understand the national and local impact of the cost-of-living pressures a cost-of-living dashboard/scorecard, monitored locally by the lead officers group, was created. This dashboard uses a range of metrics to measure the local impact of the cost-of-living pressures. The dashboard is updated on a monthly basis to help identify any significant patterns or trends which occur.
- 4.2 Key points from the data for the three months to January 2023 are summarised below:

National Headlines, January 2023:

- 4.2.1 Electricity prices in the UK rose by 66.7% and gas prices by 129.4% in the 12 months to January 2023 (Office for National Statistics).
- 4.2.2 The Retail Price Index (RPI) in January 2023 was 13.4% (Office for National Statistics) while the average inflation rate (CPI) was 10.1% (Bank of England)
- 4.2.3 After adjusting for inflation, pay fell in real terms over the year by 2.5%, which is among the largest drops since records began in 2001 (Office for National Statistics).
- 4.2.4 The top five cost-of-living issues reported to the CAB are council tax arrears, charitable support / foodbanks, energy debts, energy, and personal independent payment (PIP).
- 4.2.5 Around 9 in 10 adults reported their cost-of-living had risen compared with a year ago. The most commonly reported reasons given were rises in the price of food shopping (95%), gas or electricity bills (73%), and fuel (39%) (Office for National Statistics).

Local Headlines, November 22 to January 2023

Crisis support requests

- 4.3 The total number of requests for Household Support Fund / Local Welfare Provision support increased from 216 in November to 437 in December and 478 in January.
- 4.4 Demand for fuel tops ups spiked in December and has been maintained in January.
- 4.5 There was a spike in foodbank access in December, particularly in households with children. Requests in January decreased to more normal levels.

Requests for Advice

- 4.6 The Here2Help web pages had 5,236 views in January 2023, a decrease of 1,525 from December 2022.
- 4.7 Requests for advice through other channels increased:
- The number of SCH money advice referrals increased from 90 in December 2022 to 171 in January 2023.
 - The Citizen's Advice Bureau report that the number of people seeking advice for health and community care issues increased significantly from 531 in December 2022 to 811 in January 2023. The number with personal independence payment issues increased from 56 in December 2022 to 90 in January 2023.
 - There was an increase in people seeking mental health support in January with a peak of 450 calls to the mental health advice line between 2nd and 8th January.

Housing stress

- 4.8 The number of Council tenants having difficulties with paying their rent is increasing. Solihull Community Housing report that direct debit recalls and total rent arrears both increased in January 2023 while the number of Notice of Seeking Possession issued increased to 71 in January 2023 (49 in November and 33 in December).
- 4.9 Homeless presentations due to private rented tenancy ending increased from 10 in December to 20 in January and presentations due to being a victim of domestic abuse increased from 21 in November 2023 to 34 in January 2023.

Mental Health

- 4.10 Demand for mental health services is rising. There is clear evidence of growing concerns, with significant increases in demand for advice and information about

specific conditions including:

- people seeking advice and information about anxiety;
- people seeking advice and information about self-harm;
- people seeking advice and information about PTSD;
- people seeking advice and information about OCD.

4.11 For children and young people, the latest evidence suggests that rates of mental illness may be growing at a faster rate than amongst adults. Between 2017 and 2022, rates of probable mental disorder increased from around 1 in 8 young people aged 7-16 to more than 1 in 6. *Source: health pressures data analysis (bma.org.uk)*

Suicide

4.12 We have seen a recent increase in those showing signs of suicide idealisation which is in line with seasonal trends but we will continue to review this area to see if this rise continues.

4.13 Seasonal differences in suicide rates, such as a peak during spring, is a well-recognised feature of suicide in the UK and internationally. National Suicide Rates are noted below for information. *Source: Latest suicide data | Suicide facts and figures | Samaritans*

- 5219 suicides were registered in 2021*. This is 307 more than in 2020.
- Males aged 50-54 were found to have the highest suicide rate (22.5 per 100,000).

5. Reasons for recommending preferred option

5.1 The rise in inflation, driven by rising energy prices, has put household budgets under significant strain.

5.2 There is an increase in the number of people seeking support. This includes increased use of foodbanks and increasing claims for council tax reductions.

5.3 The number of homelessness presentations continue to rise.

5.4 We continue to work with our partners across the public sector and VCS, to target support for the most vulnerable. We continue to meet fortnightly with representatives of our key VCS organisation and the latest feedback from this group is attached at Appendix 2.

5.5 Through our approach we aim to reduce the worst and longer-term implications of cost-of-living pressures by continuing to provide:

- Consistent and easily accessible information and messaging so everyone is aware

of the support available – Here2Help.

- Accurate, timely and accessible advice and help to different groups and household circumstances.
- Sufficient capacity and capability in the system to meet the predicted demands from the impact of the cost-of-living pressures.

6. Implications and Considerations

6.1 State how the proposals in this report contribute to the priorities in the [Council Plan](#):

Priority:	Contribution:
<p>People and Communities:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Improving outcomes for children and young people in Solihull. 2. Good quality, responsive, and dignified care and support for Adults in Solihull when they need it. 3. Take action to improve life chances and health outcomes in our most disadvantaged communities. 4. Enable communities to thrive. 	<p>This approach will support our residents through a challenging time and will help them to manage and respond to additional Pressures by targeting grants and financial support.</p>
<p>Economy:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. Develop and promote the borough's economy, with a focus on revitalising our town and local centres. 6. Maximising the opportunities of UK Central and HS2. 7. Increase the supply of affordable and social housing that is environmentally sustainable. 	<p>Business too may find the next few months difficult and by supporting them and their employees to access good information, advice and additional financial support easily may mean that jobs are protected.</p>
<p>Environment:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 8. Enhance our natural environment, improve air quality and reduce net carbon emissions. 	<p>Not applicable</p>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 9. Promote employee wellbeing 	<p>Public sector workers are not protected from these challenges and it is important that as a good employer we do what we can to ensure that they have support to help them.</p>

6.2 Consultation and Scrutiny:

6.2.1 Our plans continue to develop and are contributed to by consulting with a range of partners including Voluntary, Social Enterprise and Community Sector (VCSE) groups and organisations.

6.3 Financial implications:

6.3.1 We continue to distribute existing and planned grants and funds to ensure we are targeting these quickly and effectively at the correct people. Currently the Council has the following grants available:

- VCSE Development Reserve (SMBC);
- Household Support Fund (Department for Work and Pensions);
- Holiday Activity and Food Programme (Department for Education).

6.4 Legal implications:

6.4.1 There are no legal implications to this report

6.5 Risk implications, including Risk Appetite:

6.5.1 We have not identified any risks associated with this report.

6.6 Equality implications:

6.6.1 Our response to this issue needs to be inclusive and proportionate and will be determined by local data and evidence of need.

6.7 Linkages to our work with the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA), Local Enterprise Partnership or the Birmingham & Solihull Integrated Care System (ICS):

6.7.1 Clearly this is an area that affects all parts of the country and we will be looking how other parts of the UK are addressing matters, to bring good practice to Solihull.

7. List of appendices referred to

7.1 Appendix 1 – Solihull Data Dashboard November 2022 to January 2023

7.2 Appendix 2 - Feedback from Voluntary and Community Sector Group

8. Background papers used to compile this report

8.1 None

9. List of Other Relevant Documents

9.1 None