

Meeting of:	Cabinet
Date of Meeting:	Thursday, 15 December 2022
Relevant Scrutiny Committee:	Corporate Performance and Resources Scrutiny Committee Homes and Safe Communities Scrutiny Committee
Report Title:	Cost of Living Support for Food, Warm Spaces & Other Means of Support
Purpose of Report:	To present an overview of the work the Council has undertaken to address the cost of living crisis including help to improve access to food across the Vale of Glamorgan and outline how this work and funding opportunities connect with providing a Warm Welcome this winter and other work to assist people struggling with the rising cost of living. To raise awareness of the recent Audit Wales 'Time for change – poverty in Wales' report and the Council's proposed response.
Report Owner:	Executive Leader and Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources
Responsible Officer:	Tom Bowring, Director of Corporate Resources
Elected Member and Officer Consultation:	No specific Ward Member consultation has been undertaken
Policy Framework:	This matter is for Executive decision by Cabinet
<p>Executive Summary:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welsh Government has previously put two schemes in place to provide support for those impacted by the cost of living crisis. The mandatory scheme made £150 available to all Band A to D Council taxpayers and those in receipt of Council Tax Reduction. The discretionary scheme has targeted those who have potentially fallen through the gaps of the mandatory scheme and those most impacted by the crisis. To date, 36,305 households have been supported through the cost of living scheme. • Food insecurity has been increasing both nationally and locally as documented in the Community Impact Assessments September 2020 and March 2021 highlighting the impacts of COVID-19 and the Public Services Board's recent Well-being Assessment. • It is expected that food insecurity will be further exacerbated by the cost of living crisis. The impact of the cost of living crisis has been reported anecdotally with a reduction in the food donations local food support organisations are receiving and increases in the number of people using their services. 	

- Several funding streams have been made available to the local authority to support those most in need of accessing food and tackling food poverty. Recently Welsh Government via the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) has provided additional funding to tackle food insecurity and to provide warm spaces over the winter period, the warm spaces are being promoted in the Vale under the title of a Warm Welcome.
- Details on how recent funding has been allocated and additional funding streams recently announced by Welsh Government are provided in this report. In addition, an overview of some of the food poverty related work that the Council is a key partner of and the plans for the Warm Welcome campaign are also provided.
- Audit Wales have recently published a report 'Time for Change – Poverty in Wales' which includes a number of key findings and recommendations for consideration.

Recommendations

1. That Cabinet notes the report and intended way forward to distribute the remaining 2022/23 funding streams.
2. That this report is referred to Corporate Performance and Resources and Homes and Safe Scrutiny Committees for their information and in particular consideration of the Council's response to the Audit Wales Report with their views referred with the report to Governance & Audit Committee for consideration, with any views of these Committees referred back to Cabinet for approval of the actions in response to Audit Wales's work.

Reasons for Recommendations

1. To enable Members to consider the progress being made in the delivery of multiple funding streams and projects to improve access to food.
2. This report is subject to scrutiny by these committees and the response to the Audit Wales Report considered by the Governance & Audit Committee prior to approval by Cabinet.

1. Background

- 1.1 The economic challenges facing the UK, Wales and the Vale of Glamorgan are well known. The impact for the Vale of Glamorgan was presented in October 2022 to all Scrutiny Committees and Cabinet through the [Financial Strategy 2023/24 and Medium Term Financial Plan Refresh](#). This report highlights the in year pressures driven predominantly by the cost of living crisis and the significant funding gap in 2023/24 and across the medium term. The scale of the gap for Council's budget for 2023/24 was forecast at £28.190M as indicated in the October report.
- 1.2 Food insecurity has been increasing both nationally and locally as documented in the Community Impact Assessments [September 2020](#) and [March 2021](#) (which highlighted the impacts of COVID-19) and the Public Services Board's recent [Well-being Assessment](#). This can be seen at a UK level in the [State of Hunger 2021](#) Report that describes how the Trussell Trust UK network distributed 18% more food parcels in 2019/20 compared to 2018/19.
- 1.3 It is expected that food insecurity will be further exacerbated by the cost of living crisis. Local food support organisations are experiencing a drop in donations and an increase in service users. The impact this is having is evidenced in a recent UK wide research by the [Joseph Roundtree Foundation](#) on the cost of living crisis. That research found that between May and June 2022 5.2 million low-income households (45%) have either cut down on or skipped meals or gone hungry because there was not enough money for food in the previous 30 days. 3.2 million (27%) have been unable to adequately heat their home since the start of

2022. Rather than having to choose between heating or eating, 2.3 million households (21%) have gone without both.

- 1.4** Data at a Vale of Glamorgan level is available through regular economic impact reports, two Community Impact Assessments exploring the impact of the pandemic on our communities, a report on food insecurity in the Vale of Glamorgan, and within the recent Public Services Board's Well-being Assessment. These reports have been, and will continue to be, shared with all elected members.
- 1.5** In the Vale of Glamorgan there are approx. 11 food support organisations including a number of schools that are active across our communities working to help improve access to food for those most in need. These organisations provide a range of initiatives such as Big Bocs Bwyds with 'pay as you can' models in place alongside the Vale Foodbanks who provide crucial crisis support. Anecdotally many local organisations have informed us of decreases in the volume of food donations being received and increases in service demand over recent weeks.
- 1.6** In 2021/22 funding was provided by Welsh Government via the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) to tackle food poverty and address food insecurity in relation to the EU Transition Fund. Funding was also made available to tackle food poverty through the Household Support Fund. In total £96,701 was awarded to the local authority under these streams. This funding was used to directly support 10 local support organisations including a number of schools, the Penarth Food Pod run by the Council's housing team and Vale Foodbanks.
- 1.7** The funding was also used alongside a small amount of period dignity funding to create nearly 1,200 food and essential hygiene support parcels distributed by colleagues in Housing, Homelessness Team, Adult Social Services, C1V, Flying Start, Early Help Team, Employment Team, Intake and Family Support Teams, and the Young People Leaving Care 15 Plus Team. Parcels were also distributed through the Supporting People Team by partners including Llamau, Pobl, Hafod, Atal y Fro and the Wallich.
- 1.8** In 2022/23 several other funding streams have been made available to support work to tackle the cost of living crisis, food poverty and the establishment of warm spaces. An overview of these funding streams and work related to the cost of living crisis is provided below.
- 1.9** In November 2022, Audit Wales published the report 'Time for Change – Poverty in Wales' which explores the challenge of poverty in Wales and details a number of recommendations for National and Local Government to respond to. This report provides details of the Audit Wales work and proposed response from the Council.

2. Key Issues for Consideration

2.1 In the spring of 2022, the Director of Corporate Resources established a cross departmental Cost of Living Group. The Group comprises officers from across the organisation who meet on a regular basis to discuss cost of living related activity, emerging data, and explore any gaps in support. This has strategically shaped our response to the crisis. The cost of living crisis is recognised in the Council's Risk Register, reflecting on the wide-ranging and significant impact the crisis is having on the organisation and the communities we serve.

2.2 The following outlines the impact of the work underway to address this crisis.

Funding Overview

2.3 Earlier in the year, Cabinet approved proposals for the Welsh Government Cost of Living Scheme which comprised two parts (mandatory and discretionary schemes). The mandatory scheme made £150 available to all Band A to D Council taxpayers and those in receipt of Council Tax Reduction. The Discretionary scheme has also targeted those who have potentially fallen through the gaps of the mandatory scheme and those most impacted by the crisis. To date, 36,305 households have been supported through the cost of living scheme.

2.4 The Council is also responsible for processing £200 payments of the Winter Fuel Scheme on behalf of Welsh Government. To date, 8,527 people have been paid a total of £1,705,400. A further 958 applicants are being processed.

2.5 In addition to these, funding for this financial year has been provided to the Council to:

- Direct support for households via the Household Support Fund to tackle food poverty.
- Further support the work to tackle food poverty through the Direct Food Support Fund in 2 instalments.
- Support community food organisations as part of the Discretionary Cost of Living Fund approved by Cabinet in June 2022.
- Support Food Partnerships in Wales.
- Support warm spaces this winter.

2.6 A summary of the different food poverty and warm spaces related funding streams available for the 2022/23 financial year is provided in the table below:

Funding Stream	Date Received	Total Received	Total Awarded to Date
Household Support Fund	14/04/2022	£32,474	£32,474
Direct Food Support Fund 1	06/10/2022	£17,151	£0

Direct Food Support Fund 2	16/11/2022	£32,945	£29,920
Cost of Living Discretionary Fund (Part of £825k total allocation)	09/06/2022	£50,000	£50,000
Food Partnership Fund	Awaited	£97,000 (indicative)	N/A
Warm Banks Fund	15/11/2022	£33,196	£11,671
Total		£165,766 (£262,766 including indicative)	£124,065

- 2.7** £32,747 in Household Support funding was awarded to 6 local support organisations to help with purchasing additional stock and expanding Fareshare memberships.
- 2.8** £29,920 in Direct Food Support funding has been allocated to local food support organisations to help with purchasing additional stock, increase Fareshare memberships and to support a pilot 'pop up' foodbank in Barry.
- 2.9** £50,000 of Discretionary Cost of Living funding has been used to both support the Vale Foodbank (with additional stock, a contribution to a new delivery vehicle and to provide hot meals in a partnership with the Probation service) and to the six schools in the Pencoedtre school cluster, Cadoxton, Oak Field, Holton, Jenner, Pencoedtre and Colcot (to provide funding to purchase food for their local community food offers, to provide community cooking workshops and for the 'soup and song' project).
- 2.10** To date, £11,671 Warm Banks funding has been allocated to a range of community organisation to provide warm refreshments, room hire, contributions to additional utility bills and volunteer expenses.
- 2.11** Work is progressing to capture a wide range of bids from local organisations across the remaining funding streams. These proposals will be reviewed collectively to ensure the most appropriate streams are used for the different sources of funding to ensure the funding has maximum impact across the Vale of Glamorgan. Discussions to review the funding have taken place with colleagues across the Council and Cardiff and Vale Public Health Team, in particular in relation to the Food Partnership Fund.
- 2.12** The Food Partnership Fund has very recently been announced and aims to develop cross sector food partnerships and strengthen existing food partnerships and to support the development of a long term vision for tackling food poverty. The award of funding will be made to the Council upon submission of proposals in December 2022, with work commencing shortly thereafter.

Warm Welcome / Croeso Cynnes

- 2.13** The funding to support the delivery of warm spaces will be utilised alongside work by Council services to create venues which offer a Warm Welcome in the Vale. Our aim is to create a network of warm spaces across the county each offering a Warm Welcome which could include various activities ranging from a sociable location with free refreshments to support and advice. The scheme will primarily focus on supporting community led services by providing funding and promotion and will enable flexibility in what is offered across different communities to meet different needs.
- 2.14** Work has been completed to gather information about existing and potential warm spaces, while also promoting the availability of funding to organisations. A [Warm Welcome webpage](#) has been launched on the Council's website, which includes an interactive map and a search directory to promote warm spaces and allow the public to search for venues near them. There are currently 26 warm spaces listed on the directory. The map and directory will be updated as more warm spaces are established and further promotion of the availability of funding is underway to support further warm spaces to be established.

Council Food Access Projects

- 2.15** Progress continues to be made across a number of food access projects where the Council is a key a partner. For example, the Penarth Food Pod established by the Housing Department is now being used by approximately 75 people on a weekly basis. A nearby pod has recently been developed as an Information Pod where residents can access support on issues including housing, volunteering, employability, training and digital skills.
- 2.16** Progress has also been made on the Llantwit Major Food Project where local partners including the Council have co-produced a set of actions aimed to improve access to food in the rural area following engagement with local experts and residents. The project was awarded £98,702 through the National Lottery People and Places small grant stream to progress their work in the area which includes the newly established More Than Food Hub at the CF61 Community Centre that provides wrap around support, advice and signposting alongside the GVS Food Share Pantry, St Athan Clothes Bank Pop Up and 'Chatty Café'. More information can be found on the project's webpage [here](#).

Wider Support

- 2.17** Recognising the wide ranging impacts the cost of living crisis may be having on our communities the [Cost of Living Support webpage](#) has been launched on the Council's website to provide information on the help and support that is available to residents through Council services, and wider organisations. This is being widely promoted via social media, the Council's staff in contact with residents and via regular press releases.
- 2.18** The Council's internal StaffNet also provides information on the support available to staff. A Cost of Living webinar was held on 8th November to provide staff with the latest information and help available in addition to tips on reducing costs, maximising income, managing debt and creating good money habits. To further

support staff in the summer of 2022 the Council took the decision to adopt the real living wage pay rate.

- 2.19** The Cost of Living working group continues to meet to monitor the impact and effectiveness of the work described above and to oversee the disbursement of funding to projects. This work will continue to contribute to the reporting of cost of living as a corporate risk to the Governance and Audit Committee and Cabinet as part of the Council's Risk Register.

Audit Wales Report

- 2.20** Audit Wales published the report '[Time for Change – Poverty in Wales](#)' on the 1st November 2022 which explores the challenge of poverty in Wales and details a number of recommendations for National and Local Government to respond. The findings and recommendations of this report will be considered in detail to inform work in the Vale together with our own data and insights.

- 2.21** The recommendations for Councils are:

R2 Local strategies, targets and performance reporting for tackling and alleviating poverty

- 'We recommend that the councils use their Wellbeing Plans to provide a comprehensive focus on tackling poverty to co-ordinate their efforts, meet local needs and support the revised national plan targets and actions. This should: include SMART local actions with a greater emphasis on prevention; include a detailed resourcing plan for the length of the strategy; be developed with involvement from other public sector partners, the third sector, and those with experience of poverty; include a robust set of consistent outcome indicators and measures to increase understanding of poverty locally; and be subject to annual public reporting to enable a whole system view of poverty locally to help improve delivery and support.'

R3 Leadership on the poverty agenda

- 'We recommend that each council designate a cabinet member as the council's poverty champion and designate a senior officer to lead and be accountable for the anti-poverty agenda.'

R5 Experience mapping to create inclusive services for people in poverty

- 'We recommend that councils improve their understanding of their residents' 'lived experience' through meaningful involvement in decision-making using 'experience mapping' and/or 'Poverty Truth Commissions' to review and improve accessibility to and use of council services.'

R6 Single web landing page for people seeking help

- 'We recommend that councils optimise their digital services by creating a single landing page on their website that: is directly accessible on the home page; provides links to all services provided by the council that

relate to poverty; and provides information on the work of partners that can assist people in poverty.'

R7 Streamlining and improving application and information services for people in poverty

- 'We recommend that councils: establish corporate data standards and coding that all services use for their core data; undertake an audit to determine what data is held by services and identify any duplicated records and information requests; create a central integrated customer account as a gateway to services; undertake a data audit to provide refresher training to service managers to ensure they know when and what data they can and cannot share; and review and update data sharing protocols to ensure they support services to deliver their data sharing responsibilities.'

R8 Complying with the socio-economic duty

- 'We recommend that councils review their integrated impact assessments or equivalent to: ensure that they draw on relevant, comprehensive and current data (nothing over 12 months old) to support analysis; ensure integrated impact assessments capture information on: involvement activity setting out those the service has engaged with in determining its strategic policy such as partners, service users and those it is coproducing with; the cumulative impact/mitigation to ensure the assessment considers issues in the round and how it links across services provided across the council; how the council will monitor and evaluate impact and will take corrective action; and an action plan setting out the activities the Council will take as a result of the Integrated Impact Assessment.'

2.22 These recommendations will be addressed as outlined in the management framework in Appendix 1.

2.23 This report is the first of three by Audit Wales on the challenge of alleviating and tackling poverty in Wales. The two remaining reports will focus on potential solutions.

2.24 The cross departmental Cost of Living Group are now looking to focus on the delivery of the response to the Audit Wales report, considering issues relating to cross-council initiatives (with both an internal and external focus), oversight of various funding streams and the development and delivery of anti-poverty policy, data and insight.

2.25 Cabinet is requested to consider the framework and as part of referring this report to Scrutiny Committees (Homes & Safe Communities and Corporate Performance & Resources) request they consider the actions proposed, referring any views to the Governance & Audit Committee for their consideration prior to being referred back to Cabinet for approval. Upon approval, these actions will be regularly monitored via the Strategic Insight Board and reported on to

Governance & Audit Committee and Cabinet as part of the Council's regulatory report monitoring arrangements.

- 2.26** The cost of living crisis has been recognised within the draft Annual Delivery Plan as a critical challenges with the draft Plan identifying areas for future action. The draft Annual Delivery Plan is currently out for consultation. The Vale of Glamorgan Public Services Board's [draft Well-being Plan](#) that is being consulted upon until January 2023 recognises the cost of living crisis and need to work collaboratively to address the impact on our residents.

3. How do proposals evidence the Five Ways of Working and contribute to our Well-being Objectives?

- 3.1** The Council's Annual Delivery Plan 2022/23 has a theme specifically relating to hardship and draws together a series of actions across the Council focused on providing support, advice and assistance to those most in need. The draft plan for 2023/24 recognises cost of living as a critical challenge for both the Council and our communities.
- 3.2** A collaborative approach will be taken to identify how the different grant funding streams can most effectively be utilised across the Vale. A cross team Warm Welcome group continues to meet on a regular basis to progress this workstream with support from local stakeholders. Partners in Cardiff and Vale University Health Board and the local food partnership Food Vale will continue to be actively included in the funding decision making process.
- 3.3** Whilst supporting those in more immediate need the work and funding will assist residents to access wider support that may contribute towards preventing future problems often related to food and fuel poverty.

4. Climate Change and Nature Implications

- 4.1** Whilst there are no specific implications efforts will be made to promote active travel routes to warm spaces through the Warm Welcome directory and to promote the use of recycled items to provide warm drinks and snacks.
- 4.2** Funding received for the Llantwit Food Project includes a small amount of funding to be used to improve local community gardens and community transport options.

5. Resources and Legal Considerations

Financial

- 5.1** There will be no additional cost to the Council to distribute the funding streams and details of the schemes are described in the body of this report.

Employment

- 5.2 There are no specific employment implications arising as a direct result of this report.

Legal (Including Equalities)

- 5.3 There are no specific legal considerations arising as a direct result of this report. Welsh Government grant awarded letters have detailed the purpose of the funding streams to support those most in need in our communities.
- 5.4 Data to help understand the reach and demand on services applying for funding has been requested and will be considered when reviewing bids received.

6. Background Papers

[Discretionary Cost of Living Scheme Cabinet Report 9th June 2022](#)

[Financial Strategy 2023/24 and Medium Term Financial Plan Refresh 6th October 2022](#)

[Cost of Living: The Living Wage & Pay Rates for Grades One and Two Staff 9th June 2022](#)

Appendix 1

Audit Wales Recommendation	Proposed Action	Officer Responsible	Completion Date
R2 Local strategies, targets and performance reporting for tackling and alleviating poverty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reflect Cost of Living as a critical challenge in the Council’s Annual Delivery Plan (ADP) for 2023/24. • Identify the actions across the ADP contributing to this challenge and link with specific service plan actions. • Consider the proposals from Audit Wales regarding the emphasis of actions when completing service planning activity, including related measures. • Produce regular performance reports for Cabinet and Scrutiny Committees which provide updates relating to this critical challenge to enable oversight and scrutiny. • Reflect this in the Council’s Annual Report (Annual Self-Assessment). 	<p>Tom Bowring</p> <p>Tom Bowring</p> <p>Heads of Service</p> <p>Tom Bowring</p> <p>Tom Bowring</p>	<p>March 2023</p> <p>March 2023</p> <p>March 2023</p> <p>On-going</p> <p>November 2023</p>
R3 Leadership on the poverty agenda	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cabinet Member for Community Engagement, Equalities & Regulatory Services champions poverty at Cabinet level. • A dedicated champion is also in place within the wider elected member population and is part of the Champions Network which is integral to delivering the Council’s Public Participation Strategy. • Director of Corporate Resources to lead and be accountable for the anti-poverty agenda as part of the Council and PSB’s work in this arena. 	<p>N/A</p> <p>N/A</p> <p>Tom Bowring</p>	<p>-</p> <p>-</p> <p>December 2023</p>
R5 Experience mapping to create inclusive services for people in poverty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Progress the Public Participation Strategy, in particular making links with the Champions Network. • Progress the Public Services Board’s work on anti-poverty which is undertaking community needs analysis within the County’s most deprived communities. • Maintain insight reports on poverty within the communities of the Vale of Glamorgan as part of developing the evidence base to support the Public Services Board’s work on the forthcoming Wellbeing Plan 2023-2028. 	<p>Cllr Sivagnanam</p> <p>Tom Bowring</p> <p>Tom Bowring</p>	<p>On-going</p> <p>March 2024/ On-going to 2028</p> <p>On-going to 2028</p>

R6 Single web landing page for people seeking help	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain updates to the Council’s Cost of Living page which is available from the homepage of the Council’s website. • Further strengthen the signposting to the support available from partner organisations. 	Tom Bowring	On-going
R7 Streamlining and improving application and information services for people in poverty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review the feasibility of the recommendation made that “councils: establish corporate data standards and coding that all services use for their core data; undertake an audit to determine what data is held by services and identify any duplicated records and information requests; create a central integrated customer account as a gateway to services; undertake a data audit to provide refresher training to service managers to ensure they know when and what data they can and cannot share; and review and update data sharing protocols to ensure they support services to deliver their data sharing responsibilities.’ • This will be undertaken by the Cost of Living Working group and will build on proposals to produce a Data Strategy, deliver the Council’s replacement Customer Relationship Management System (including an online customer ‘account’ and the Data Protection & Information Security action plan. 	Tom Bowring/ Cost of Living Working group	March 2023
R8 Complying with the socio-economic duty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review the equalities impact assessment (which incorporates consideration of the socio-economic duty) in line with the recommendations made by Audit Wales in the national study report to review the Equality Impact Assessments and the process supporting their use. 	Tom Bowring	May 2023