

Question from Councillor P Kimber

Councillors, I'm asking a question as to **what provision this Council is making for next winter** to support the most vulnerable in our Dorset community?

As you know, Martin Lewis has painted quite a bleak picture on energy bills and food pricing both of which are set to rise dramatically.

An average families energy bill is forecast to average £3600 this Autumn and rise to £4200 in January 2023.

The latest 2021 census results for Dorset show 112,300 people aged 65 and over at 29.6% of the population, compared to 24.6% in 2011. Nationally the figure is 16.4%. If no action is taken to support Dorset's ever growing elderly population our social services will be put under even more pressure.

What are we the Dorset Council doing? What are our plans to deal with the **elderly** who will be facing dramatic financial hardship, our **residents with disabilities** who cannot leave home and need to be kept warm, and Dorset families, all of whom will have difficulty in managing?

Response from the Portfolio Holder for Culture, Communities and Customer Services

The Executive Director for Corporate Development, Aidan Dunn has brought together a network of officers and representatives from the community and voluntary sector to coordinate a response to the Cost of Living Crisis using the Dorset Together model of network support that has been successfully used for other issues such as Covid and the Ukraine response. The network has been focusing on:

- Direct financial aid
- Better access to housing services,
- Urging people to act early
- Signposting to support on money (debts, benefits, budgeting), food, housing and mental health

Some key highlights include:

- Our 'Cost of living help' campaign was launched in partnership with Dorset Together on 15 June, with a new [Cost of Living Help](#) web page and key messages to residents.
- By the end of August Dorset Council Tax had paid £150 Energy Rebates totalling £15,849,000 to 105,660 households
- We are currently processing the final claims that have been received.
- Those households which are eligible, but who have not submitted a claim will have the £150 Council Tax Energy Rebate paid directly onto their Council Tax account by 30 September.
- An £877,800 discretionary fund will be open for applications soon with the awards processed by the closing date of 30 November
- We are working with Citizen's Advice in Dorset and Age UK to offer help and advice and ensure people are getting the support they need.
- We have continued to administer the government's Household Support Fund to funding to support households with children, adults of pensionable age and other households in need of support, including those with disabilities. This is

providing support with energy and food costs and currently open for applications and will close on the 30th September, and has amounted to just over £2.2M for the 6 month period April to September 2022. There is further funding available for the next 6 months.

- We are promoting the uptake of Free School meals and Healthy Start vouchers and have used funding from government to provide free school meal vouchers in the holidays. We have delivered the Summer in Dorset Programme (holiday and food activities) to low income families and a range of free activities for free activities for children with special educational needs and disabilities.
- Our Housing Team has recently introduced a single number for all housing enquiries and a new triage team to ensure those who most urgently need help get help first.