

People and Health Scrutiny Committee

20 July 2026

Cost of Living Impact Report 2025-26

For Review and Consultation

Cabinet Member:

Cllr M Bell – Cabinet Member for Public Health, Prevention & Communities

Senior Leadership Team:

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Statutory Authority:

Report status: Public [Choose an item.](#)

1. Executive summary

1.1. This paper provides an update on the impact on the projects funded in April 2025 - March 2026. The projects were agreed by Cllr Ryan Hope, lead Cabinet Member and the Section 151 Officer. A mid-year report was approved by members of the People and Health Scrutiny committee in November 2025. This report outlines the impacts and outcomes that have been achieved through targeted use of the cost-of-living fund.

1.2. These outcomes include:

- **155** households have been financially supported to prevent homelessness
- Tenancy sustainment Officer targeted support kept **57** residents with complex needs in accommodation. **31%** of these reported a reduction in anxiety /depression as a result
- Targeted incentives and training have strengthened landlord engagement, resulting in **131** privately rented lets secured, helping prevent homelessness and reduce reliance on temporary accommodation.
- **99** Households received **135** essential appliances, **49** of the recipients declared as having a disability
- **71%** of Citizens Advice debt and energy support project declared as having a disability/long term health condition
- DHP uplift meant a total of **783** households were supported either with 1 one-off or longer-term support preventing homelessness.
- Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) supported an additional **10** energy improvement grants including broken boilers.

- **28** grants were given to Community Transport organisations
- **11** sustainable and affordable food projects were supported helping to move away from emergency food provision.
- **1038** older people received face to face support to apply for entitled welfare benefits
- **1000** additional Holiday and Activity Food places were funded contributing to improved food security and supporting children's health and wellbeing during the school holidays

1.3. Overall, the Cost-of-Living Programme continues to demonstrate strong value for money and clear preventative impact, reducing pressure on higher cost statutory services while improving outcomes for residents. Crucially, it provides a robust operational and partnership foundation for the delivery of the council's Crisis and Resilience Fund (CRF) going forward, supporting a strategic shift from short term crisis response towards longer term household resilience.

2. Recommendation(s)

2.1 That members review and comment on the progress and impact of the Cost-of-Living Programme during 2025/26, including the use of preventative and reactive funding and its role in supporting delivery of the Crisis and Resilience Fund.

3. Reason for the recommendation(s)

3.1 The Place and Resources Overview Committee requested that regular updates on cost-of-living funded projects are reported to the People and Health Scrutiny Committee to support oversight of delivery, impact and emerging risks.

4 Background

4.1 The Dorset Together: Cost of Living Programme was established in 2022 in response to rising living costs and their impact on Dorset residents. Delivered in partnership with statutory organisations and the voluntary and community sector (VCS), the programme is informed by data insight and intelligence from grassroots partners. It has been designed to operate flexibly, enabling targeted support to respond to emerging need.

4.2 Following three years of delivery, the Cost-of-Living Programme has become an established part of Dorset Council's support offer. What began as time limited investment has now transitioned into the council's base budget, reflecting a sustained commitment to supporting vulnerable residents and recognising that cost of living pressures are increasingly linked to longer-term structural challenges rather than short-term shocks.

4.3 In 2025/26, the programme continued to operate alongside national funding, including the Household Support Fund (HSF), with activity focused on filling identified gaps in local and national provision. Projects and spend have been agreed through established governance arrangements, with oversight from Overview and Scrutiny Committees.

4.4 A full list of authorised projects and expenditure is provided in **Appendix 1**. Infographic in **Appendix 3**. A full background of the programme to date can be found in the **background papers**.

4.5 The cost-of-living challenge continues to have a significant impact on Dorset's most vulnerable residents. A proactive, evidence-led and preventative approach has enabled the council to support households to stabilise their circumstances, reduce escalation into crisis and build longer term resilience.

5. Importance of the Programme

5.1 The Cost-of-Living Programme plays a critical role in alleviating financial pressure on vulnerable households. Support has included direct assistance alongside advice and early intervention, helping residents to meet essential needs, reduce the risk of debt, eviction and food insecurity, and mitigate the wider health and wellbeing impacts associated with financial hardship.

5.2 This partnership-based model not only enhances short-term impact but also strengthens community resilience. Continued investment remains important for supporting residents through ongoing economic pressures and addressing longer-term structural vulnerability.

5.3 With the introduction of the Crisis and Resilience Fund from April 2026, the cost-of-living fund will continue to work alongside the national government support to identify local gaps in support.

6. Key Outcomes of the Cost-of-Living Programme

6.1 A comprehensive evaluation of activity, outputs and outcomes across all funded projects is provided in **Appendix 2**, including quantitative performance data and qualitative learning.

6.2 Overall, the Cost-of-Living Programme successfully delivered all agreed projects within the planned timeframe during 2025/26. Ongoing alignment with national funding streams, including the Household Support Fund, enabled flexibility in delivery, avoided duplication and maximised value for money. The programme continued to complement national provision by addressing locally identified gaps and responding to emerging need, ensuring support was targeted where it could have the greatest preventative impact.

7. Continuation and Transition to the Crisis and Resilience Fund

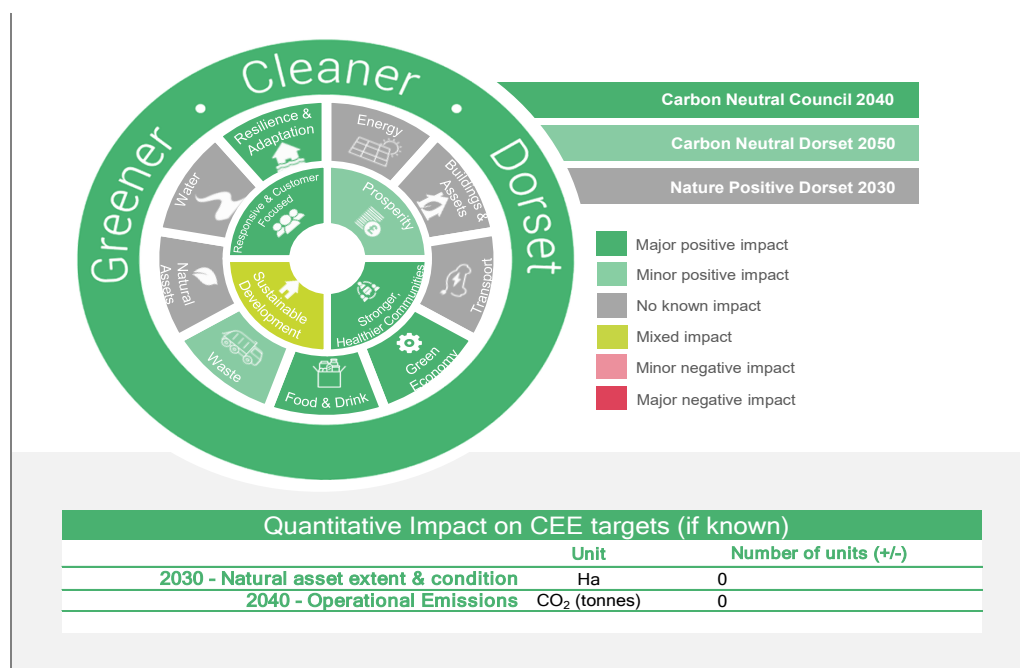
- 7.1 As agreed at Cabinet, ongoing funding of £500,000 per year has been built into the council's base budget to support cost of living related activity. This provides financial stability and reflects a longer-term commitment to prevention and early intervention.
- 7.2 The Cost-of-Living Programme provides the operational and partnership foundation for the Crisis and Resilience Fund (CRF). Strong delivery infrastructure, established VCS partnerships and effective referral pathways place Dorset Council in a strong position to deliver the CRF, including immediate "day-one" crisis support and the phased development of longer-term resilience services.

8. Financial implications

The Household Support Fund has now been replaced by the **Crisis and Resilience Fund (CRF)**, providing Dorset Council with a three-year funding settlement of **£4.1** million per annum. While this allocation is slightly lower than previous Household Support Fund levels, the certainty of a multi-year settlement provides a significant opportunity to plan more effectively over the longer term and to reshape support in a more strategic way.

Combined with the council's ongoing **£500,000 annual base-budget investment**, the CRF enables a deliberate shift from short-term crisis response towards resilience-focused provision, supporting households to stabilise their circumstances, reduce future dependency and build longer-term financial security.

9. Natural environment, climate & ecology implications



ACCESSIBLE TABLE SHOWING IMPACTS

Natural Environment, Climate & Ecology Strategy Commitments	Impact
Energy	No known impact
Buildings & Assets	No known impact
Transport	No known impact
Green Economy	major positive impact
Food & Drink	major positive impact
Waste	minor positive impact
Natural Assets & Ecology	No known impact
Water	No known impact
Resilience and Adaptation	major positive impact
Corporate Plan Aims	Impact
Prosperity	minor positive impact
Stronger healthier communities	strongly supports it
Sustainable Development & Housing	neutral
Responsive & Customer Focused	strongly supports it

10. Well-being and health implications

This programme of activities has been designed to positively support the well-being and health of Dorset Council's residents with a range of targeted, preventative activities for those hardest hit by the high cost of living.

11. Risk implications

HAVING CONSIDERED: the risks associated with this decision; the level of risk has been identified as:

Current Risk: Low

Residual Risk: Medium

12. Equalities

Equalities Impact Assessment included in background papers

13. Appendices

- Appendix 1 – List of agreed projects and total spend for 2025-26
- Appendix 2 – Full outcomes impact report for projects 2025-26
- Appendix 3 – Infographic of project outcomes 2025-26
- Appendix 4 – Citizen's Advice (project 3) full impact report
- Appendix 5 – Community Transport grant fund (project 6) project breakdown
- Appendix 6 – Cost of Living and CRF 2026-27 project breakdown

14. Background papers

- [Cost of Living Challenge Cabinet paper 23rd February 2023](#)
- [Cost of Living Challenge People and Health Scrutiny Paper 7th March 2024](#)
- [Cost of Living Challenge Cabinet paper 11th June 2024](#)
- [Cost of Living Place and Resources Overview Committee 11th July 2024](#)
- [Cost of Living People and Health Scrutiny Committee 14th November 2024](#)
- [Cost of Living People and Health Scrutiny Committee 19 June 2025](#)
- [Cost of Living update – People and Health Scrutiny Committee 17th November 2025](#)
- [Crisis and Resilience Fund – Cabinet – 3rd March 2026](#)

15. Report sign-off

This report has been through the internal report clearance process and has been signed off by the Director, Assurance and Governance (Monitoring Officer), the Director, Resources (Section 151 Officer) and the appropriate Portfolio Holder(s)

Appendix 1 – List of funded projects for financial year 2025/26

Project no.	Project	Original budget		Total Spend	Remarks / Differences in spend
		CoL	HSF		
1	Homelessness Prevention 1.Arrears/Rent in advance & deposit payments. This will support the team to negotiate with landlords to stop evictions from taking place or help to find new suitable accommodation. 2. Tenancy Sustainment. To maintain existing capacity of one of the tenancy sustainment officers to keep proactive negotiations with landlords 3. Media and information awareness – To run a media campaign to continue to raise awareness of the importance of asking for housing help earlier in the process with us and VCS agencies, before eviction 4. Food vouchers – These will continue to be used for when a resident/s present with nothing and can immediately be given by members of the housing team whilst other emergency support can prepared	£167,000	£200,000	£367,000	

2	Invest in the Healthy Homes Dorset scheme. White goods only (previously funded by HSF) – other funding sources for insulation and boilers.	£0	£60,000	£70,000	Budget increased by 16% due to demand (£10,000)
3	Maintain x4 Citizens Advice Debt caseworkers + increased volunteer supervision. To extend the Cost of Living (debt and energy) caseworkers and add a further 0.5FTE to assist with increased demand. Additional resource for volunteer training and supervision	£100,000	£110,000	£210,000	
4	Discretionary Housing Payment Allowance Increase the amount from national government grant available to R&B teams to support residents from being made homeless.	£48,000	£0	£73,000	Additional £25,000* funding due to demand = £73,000 *£25k taken from Cost of Living underspend 2024/25
5	Disabled Facilities Grant	£0	£50,000	£50,000	
6	Community Transport This was funded by both funds; however, the impact is significant as the sector has been under funded for several years so propose a further to continue this funding at a lower level	£30,000	£30,000	£60,840	Overspend £840

7	Emergency and Affordable food security Demand for emergency and affordable food projects such as social supermarkets and foodbanks continues to increase beyond current capacity. This funding will allow 2 targeted rounds of support funding during this financial year.	£120,000	£125,000	£245,000	
8	Food security – wider sustainable and affordable projects The work that was started last FY, has really identified the gaps and now looking to invest support in more proactive projects to try and take the burden off the emergency food projects	£0	£70,000	£70,000	
9	Older People's Benefit Support - The majority of this work is physical assistance in completing applications for Attendance Allowance; Personal Independence Payments (PIP); Disability Living Allowance (DLA) and Pension Credit.	£5,000	£55,000	£60,000 (HSF)	
10	HAF Programme The holiday activities and food (HAF) programme (25/26) received a significant cut to their budget from National Government, so this funded attempts to mitigate this.	£30,000	£0	£30,000	
	TOTAL SPEND	£500,000	£700,000	£1,235,840	

Homeless Prevention

Project: Homelessness Prevention and Support (£167,000)	
About the project:	The funding has been spent in four areas: 1.1. Arrears/Rent in advance & deposit payments 1.2. Tenancy Sustainment 1.3. Media and information awareness 1.4. Emergency Food vouchers (for residents not eligible for other schemes)
Impact:	1.1 Since April 2025, 155 households benefited from financial aid to prevent homelessness and sustain their existing housing with the help on offer with arrears payments or to secure accommodation in the private rented sector through rent in advance and deposits to relieve homelessness. 1.2 Tenancy sustainment officer – providing additional targeted early intervention support to prevent people becoming homeless. The tenancy sustainment role has supported 57 clients, achieving 21 mutually agreed positive exits and preventing homelessness for individuals with complex needs, including supporting rough sleepers into accommodation. The project has delivered wider social and wellbeing outcomes, including improved mental health (31% reduction in anxiety/depression), progression into employment, training and volunteering and stabilisation of tenancies from temporary accommodation. Practical harm reduction and cost-of-living support (e.g. Swap to Stop, Naloxone, smoking cessation) has resulted in measurable financial savings and positive client feedback, demonstrating strong preventative impact. 1.3 The Early Help and Prevention campaign continues to support homelessness prevention by encouraging residents, families and landlords to seek advice at the earliest opportunity. A wide range of channels has been used to maximise reach, including high visibility advertising on waste collection vehicles, bus stops and bus rears, alongside targeted digital activity via Dorset Council social media, Google Ads and Facebook and Instagram advertising. Further promotion has taken place through internal staff communications and targeted distribution of materials to Community Mental Health Teams, libraries, foodbanks, job centres, Family Hubs and

	schools, working closely with Children's Services. Engagement has increased, with higher web traffic to the dedicated homelessness prevention webpage during February and March 2026, and a preventative case study video achieving over 20,000 views on social media. The Key4Me scheme continues to play a key role in prevention by increasing access to the private rented sector. Promotion included Christmas card mailouts to letting agents and engagement through the March Landlord Forum, attended by over 120 landlords. Targeted incentives and training have strengthened landlord engagement, resulting in 131 privately rented lets secured, helping prevent homelessness and reduce reliance on temporary accommodation. 1.4 Funding allocated for Emergency Food and Energy Vouchers supported households not eligible for other schemes; however, underspends were identified in both areas as demand was lower than anticipated. In response to emerging need, this funding was flexibly reallocated to meet increased Removals and Storage costs, an often unforeseen but critical consequence of homelessness. Rising costs linked to wages, fuel and insurance have particularly affected larger and more vulnerable households, and this agile re-prioritisation ensured essential belongings were protected and tenancies sustained where possible. A total of 477 households received emergency food vouchers, including 145 households with children, 32 containing pensioners and 187 disabled households, with recipients living in temporary accommodation (244), the private rented sector (8) and 45 individuals experiencing rough sleeping.
Outcomes:	• Early Intervention Success: Targeted support enabled issues to be identified and addressed early, preventing escalation into homelessness and reducing evictions. • Increased Housing Stability: Financial assistance and sustainment support helped households remain in their homes or secure settled accommodation, reducing homelessness risk. • Targeted and Personalised Support: Tailored interventions addressed individual needs, strengthening tenants' ability to sustain tenancies.

	• Improved wellbeing: Access to food, energy and practical support reduced stress and improved physical and mental wellbeing for vulnerable households. • Economic Benefits: Preventative interventions reduced reliance on costly emergency accommodation and crisis services. • Increased Awareness: Expanded prevention messaging improved awareness of available support, encouraging earlier engagement and timelier assistance.
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Demographics

Area	Number of households	%
North Dorset (Blandford, Gillingham, Shaftesbury, Sherborne, Sturminster Newton)	26	17
East Dorset (Wimborne, Verwood, Ferndown)	14	9
Purbeck (Wareham, Swanage)	10	6
West Dorset (Dorchester, Bridport, Lyme Regis)	26	17
Weymouth & Portland	64	41
Outside Area	14	9
Not known/recorded	1	>1
Total	155	100%

Types of households	Number	%
Households with Children	54	35%
At risk of/experienced domestic abuse	18	12%
Care leaver	3	2%
History of offending	15	10%
History of rough sleeping	3	2%
Victim of modern slavery	1	> 1%
Disability	97	63%
Served in HM Forces	1	> 1%
Over 60 years of age	16	10%

Age	n=	%
18-24	20	13
25-34	54	35
35-44	36	23
45-54	19	12
55-64	17	11

2. Provision of white goods and appliances – Ridgewater Energy

Project: Provision of white goods and appliances, focusing on geographical areas of disadvantage (£70,000)

About the project:	Working with our partner, Ridgewater Energy , to provide white goods and appliances to eligible residents in crisis or high-need situations, focusing on geographical areas of disadvantage.
Impact: Key Achievements:	Ridgewater Energy, our delivery partner, managed the project cycle of raising awareness, handling enquiries, assessing eligibility and suitability requirements (space, power, plumbing, etc.) and delivery plus removal of old/broken appliances during delivery (if safe to do so). During this period 99 home appliances were delivered.
Demographics:	• A total of 99 households benefitted. 135 appliances were delivered. • All households were low income. • 49 (49%) households had a someone claiming a disability benefit. • Tenure – 82% social housing, 9% owner occupiers, 8% private rental • Top 5 areas 1 – Weymouth (n=30); 2 – Portland (n=10); 3 – DT2 villages (n=9); 4 – Wimborne (n=7); 5 – Sherborne (n=7) • Most requested items were Cookers 43% (n=58), Washing machines 28% (n=38) and Fridge freezers 21% (n=29) • Average household order value: £700.72 • Average annual household income of clients = £16,289.17
Outcomes:	• Targeted Support for Vulnerable Residents - up to two replacement appliances for broken or unsafe items. • Improved energy awareness and access to wider support: Ridgewater Energy have been able to deliver an expert energy advice home visit through their SGN Help for Warmth scheme advice on money saving and scams awareness and provide onward referrals for external wall insulation, new boilers and white goods delivered via another funding source.

3. Citizens Advice – additional capacity to support increased demand.

Project: To extend the Cost-of-Living caseworkers to assist with increased demand. Additional resource for volunteer training and supervision (£210,000)

Citizens Advice have demonstrated significant increase in need and the impact of these officers which supports our Revenue & Benefits teams	
Impact: Key Achievements:	• Clients Supported: 1,001 individuals assisted with 2,799 issues. • Income Gains: £443,033 achieved for clients. • Debt Written Off: £834,238 successfully cleared. • £1,365,180 in financial outcomes for residents
Services Provided:	i. Energy Support: ○ 2 full-time caseworkers helped residents with energy-related issues, including heating solutions, government support and resolving supply problems. ○ Guidance on energy efficiency, reducing consumption and accessing grants for home improvements. ii. Cost of Living Outreach: ○ 1.5 full-time caseworkers focused on deprived areas (North Dorset and Bridport and district). ○ Services included home visits for vulnerable residents, welfare benefits advice, debt management and promoting financial resilience. iii. Volunteer Support: ○ Funding enabled 60 hours/week of supervision for 219 volunteers, recruiting and training 35 new volunteers. ○ Volunteers provided 9,600 hours of advice services across all Dorset Council wards.
Demographics:	• Client Profile: 71% of clients were disabled or had long-term health conditions. • Where household type data was recorded, 30% had dependent children.
Outcomes: <i>See appendix for more detail</i>	• Increased financial stability for clients through income gains, debt relief and energy cost reductions. • Improved well-being and reduced anxiety for residents during the cost-of-living crisis.

4. Revenue and Benefits – provide additional capacity for the Discretionary Housing Payment Allowance scheme

Project: To continue to support the Discretionary Housing Payment Allowance (£73,000)	
Impact:	- Discretionary Housing Payments are government-funded financial awards, allocated annually, to support residents receiving Housing Benefit or Universal Credit Housing Costs who are struggling to meet their rent. Demand for DHPs exceeds available government funding and the additional £73,000 top-up helped extend essential support to residents during periods of financial difficulty, contributing to improved housing outcome. - DHP awards are temporary and can be made as one-off payments or for a defined period. Support may include help with rent shortfalls, rent arrears, rent deposits, rent in advance, and where essential, limited moving costs to secure more suitable accommodation. - Government funding for 2025/26 was £458,298, giving a total DHP budget of £531,298. All funding was fully allocated. Total spend in 2025/26 was £551,837.37, resulting in an overspend of £20,539.37, which was covered through a contingency budget.
Key Impact:	In total, 783 households received DHP support: 234 households received one-off payments to: - Clear rent arrears and sustain tenancies - Secure accommodation through rent in advance or deposits - Assist with essential moving costs 549 households received periodic awards to help meet the shortfall between rent charges and Housing Benefit or Universal Credit Housing Costs: 467 awards for up to 26 weeks 82 awards for between 26 and 52 weeks 231 applications were declined, primarily where households were assessed as having sufficient income to meet their housing costs without additional support.

Outcomes	• Improved housing stability: Financial support enabled households to remain in their homes or secure suitable accommodation, reducing the risk of eviction and homelessness. • Improved wellbeing: Reduced financial pressure and housing insecurity contributed to improved mental wellbeing for supported households. • Economic benefits: Sustaining tenancies and preventing homelessness reduced the need for emergency accommodation and associated costs.
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Disabled Facilities Grant

Project: To continue to support the Disabilities Facilities Grant to enable energy efficient improvements to be included as part of their building adaptations programme (£50,000)	
About the project:	• The Energy Improvement Grant (funded from the Cost-of-Living funding) is designed to enable disabled homeowners and tenants to quickly access financial assistance towards a wide range of energy improvements around the home • The grant, delivered by the Dorset Accessible Homes Service (DAHS), promotes independent living and assists people coping with the ongoing cost of living crisis. It enables disabled residents to remain living at home, in warmer, more energy efficient homes, saving them money and making their homes safer and healthier. • The DAHS provide an 'end to end' works delivery process, from specifying works, appointing contractors and checking the quality of the final job.
Impact:	This tranche of funding in 2025/2 of £50,000 has delivered a further 10 Energy Improvement Grants. The average grant was £5,048. Works undertaken include replacement of broken boilers, heating improvements, insulation, replacement doors and windows.
Demographics	• Most (80%) of the recipients of the grant were aged between 50 and 90+. • 30% of households with children under 18 • 40% households with pensioners • 100% of households with a member who has a disability

Outcomes:	Lower energy bills – with new boilers, improved heating systems and better insulation individuals are likely to see a significant reduction in their heating bills Improved health and wellbeing – improved air quality, reduction of accidents and overall improved health

6. Invest in the sustainability of Dorset's community transport network

Project: Invest in community transport network via the Dorset Community Transport grant (£60,000)	
About the project:	The funding enabled the Community Transport team to deliver the Dorset Community Transport (DCT) grants programme. Two types of grants were available: • Revenue grants of up to £2,500 (no match funding required) • Capital grants of up to £5,000 (20% match funding required)
Impact: Key Achievements:	16 Community Transport schemes received funding through the DCT programme. In total, 28 grants were awarded (2 capital and 26 revenue), with some schemes receiving more than one grant. Funding supported a wide range of activity, including: • Purchase of a minibus from a ceased community transport scheme • Licensing fees for ticket machines to improve payment accessibility, running costs for multiple car schemes and website and database subscriptions to support trip planning • Electronic devices to support route planning and volunteer coordination • Introduction of a new bus route in Gillingham following the loss of NORDCAT services • Marketing to recruit volunteer drivers • Establishment of new Community Transport schemes in areas with limited or no provision • Continued delivery of services in areas with limited public transport • Additional vehicles to increase capacity on existing routes

Outcomes: More detail available in appendix 4	Volunteer recruitment and retention: Grants supported recruitment of volunteer drivers, helping to maintain essential services. Improved efficiency: Investment in digital tools and communication systems improved coordination and route planning. Sustainable service delivery: Revenue grants helped cover essential running costs, including insurance, maintenance and phone contracts. Improved fleet sustainability: Capital funding enabled vehicle purchase or upgrades, supporting longer-term viability. Reduced social isolation: Transport access enabled residents to attend medical appointments and participate in social activities. Expanded service coverage: New and enhanced schemes improved transport access across more areas of Dorset.
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7. Invest in emergency and affordable food security that has a referral system

Project: Continue to invest in emergency and affordable food security that has a referral system (£245,500 in 25/26 funded from both the Cost-of-Living Programme and the Household Support Fund – (CoL £120,000 and HSF £125,000))	
About the project:	A targeted grant programme (2 tranches throughout the 2025/26 financial year) for foodbanks and social supermarkets. Proportionate funding based on need was distributed to 15 foodbanks and 5 social supermarkets who were able to demonstrate a referral process.
Impact:	- Funding has enabled Foodbanks and Social Supermarkets to provide emergency and affordable food support to vulnerable residents - Work has been ongoing with food projects to develop robust referral mechanisms to ensure residents who use those projects have access to wraparound support as needed.

Demographics:	Funded Foodbanks and Social Supermarkets provided support for 3274 households* in August 2025, this number fluctuates every month according to need but demonstrates the numbers of household that <i>funded</i> food projects support. (* Households can be families with children, all adult households, single person households, pensioner households)
Outcomes:	Targeted Support for Foodbanks and Social Supermarkets: The grant programme provided proportionate funding based on need. Strengthened Referral Systems: The referral system ensured that those in need were efficiently directed to appropriate resources, improving access to food support Support for Refuges: Emergency food support for refuges across Dorset helped address the specific needs of those needed to seek refuge, providing them with essential resources during difficult times in partnership with Paragon. As part of this workstream we are working with projects to improve referral pathways and help people to a place of better resilience whilst ensuring the longer-term sustainability of these projects (see project xxx – reference the food networks)

[Food Security – wider sustainable and affordable food](#)

8. Invest in more VCS led sustainable and affordable food security (£70,000) - During the year we invested in 11 food projects:

8.1 Community Cooking and Skills courses – Westham, Weymouth

Community cooking sessions delivered in Westham, Weymouth (£9,047)	
About the project:	The Friendly Food Club, an established partner of Dorset Council, were contracted to deliver Community Cooking and Skills courses – (4 x 6 week sessions – total 24 sessions). Average number of six people per session, with maximum of 9 people in one session. Followed a 6-week rolling programme that features a range of skills, ingredients and topics, including batch cooking, energy

	efficient cooking, shopping tips, storage and reducing waste, as well as eating for health and basic nutrition messages
Outcomes:	• Share cooking and healthy eating skills and how to eat well on a limited budget. • Gain knowledge regarding budget cooking, reducing food waste and make the most of ingredients available. • Build confidence and resilience amongst attendees • Build social networks amongst attendees

8.2 Community Cooking and Skills courses – Portland

The Friendly Food Club - engagement with community cooking sessions – Portland £5,000)	
About the project:	Friendly Food Club delivered a community-focused engagement project on Portland, prioritising trust-building, local relationships and readiness for delivery rather than short-term activity. The project worked with over 15 local organisations, community venues and services, using face-to-face engagement, demonstration sessions and pilot youth and older people's cooking activities to embed work within existing networks.
Outcomes:	• Strengthened community connections and increased trust in Friendly Food Club as a local partner • Built confidence and readiness among residents, young people, families and delivery partners • Reduced barriers to participation by using trusted settings and relationships • Established sustainable pathways for future youth, family and community cooking provision

8.3 Get Dorset Cooking

Get Dorset Cooking – community cooking capacity-building project across Dorset (£19,813) - The Friendly Food Club	
About the project:	Get Dorset Cooking was funded by Dorset Council and delivered by The Friendly Food Club to support community organisations across Dorset to develop and deliver inclusive cooking activities. The project combined training, hands-on support, relationship-building and use of Community Cooking Kits, focusing on

	people experiencing food insecurity, social isolation and barriers to healthy eating. Delivery emphasised confidence-building and practical support rather than training alone.
Outcomes:	• Increased confidence and sustainable delivery where organisations received hands-on, practical support • Two weekly community cooking sessions successfully established and embedded (Salvation Army Wimborne and Open House Shaftesbury) • Positive participant outcomes including improved routine, wellbeing, healthier eating and reduced isolation • Clear evidence that training alone is insufficient, and that early, supported delivery unlocks long-term, volunteer-led provision • Improved understanding of barriers and a clear model for scaling community cooking sustainably across Dorset

8.4 Basic Food Hygiene Certificates

300 licences for the Basic Food Hygiene Certificate via virtual college distributed by Volunteer Centre Dorset (VCD) (including administration costs) (£5100)	
About the project:	To distribute online food hygiene courses to voluntary and community sector organisations operating in the Dorset Council area who bring their local community together for food-based initiatives – including, but not exclusive to, foodbanks, social supermarkets, community fridges, lunch clubs, youth clubs and so on
Outcomes:	VCD have allocated 547 licences, they can offer a range of three food-related modules including: • Level 1 Food Safety and Hygiene • Level 2 Food Safety and Hygiene for Catering • Food Allergy Awareness Training A wide range of organisations have taken this offer up including foodbanks, social supermarkets lunch clubs and a community pub. The offer is part of the support VCD can offer food projects across the county. The 300 funded licences release an additional 300 licences at no cost.

	Volunteer Centre Dorset is the commissioned provider of VCS infrastructure support across Dorset, offering training, support and development for the voluntary and community sector and the training licences enable organisations to improve their skills and knowledge around food related practices – as well as access to a wider range of online training.
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8.5 Food Security Network Meetings

Project: Invest in more VCS led sustainable and affordable food security projects in areas of most need – Food Security Network Meetings (£5,000)	
About the project:	Dorset Council supported the coordination and development of local food networks to strengthen collaboration between community food, advice and health partners. Activity included hosting 15 network meetings in 2026 , attended by 140 participants , alongside representation at West Dorset Community Links and Reconnection meetings. Monthly updates were shared throughout the year to highlight learning, funding opportunities and local developments, and four Steering Group meetings were held to drive priorities emerging from local networks.
Outcomes:	Reduction in foodbank referrals: Foodbank referral numbers have reduced from 2024/25. With the launch and aims of the Cost of Living Response Fund (CRF), this reduction is expected to continue throughout 2026 as partnerships are further supported to work together to build household resilience. Enhanced partnership working: There is clear evidence of strengthened collaboration between projects, including partnerships between Christians Against Poverty (CAP) and affordable food clubs; joint working between Wimborne and Corfe Mullen Foodbanks around debt support; development of a voucher scheme between Portland Foodbank and the community larder; and person-centred approaches in North Dorset, where projects are coordinating pathways tailored to individual households. Citizens Advice is also attending more community food spaces to provide energy advice and financial support.

	Identification of gaps in local provision: Networks have identified gaps in provision to help Dorset Council target funding more effectively. This includes gaps in Wareham around ‘move-on’ options from foodbank services; a need for de-escalation training addressed through policy support, links with the Community Safety Team and training provision; and the expansion of Access Wellbeing services within foodbank spaces, reflecting the growing recognition of mental health needs among residents requiring food support. Promotion of food project models: Work has supported clearer communication and understanding of food project models that are not always well understood, particularly social supermarkets. Examples include Swanage developing a poster promoting local community food offers, East Dorset projects sharing each other’s activity through social media, and features in Dorset Council publications and social media channels. The Steering Group plays a key role in bringing issues from grassroots projects to the forefront, driving critical areas of work, supporting positive and consistent communication, and providing ongoing guidance to projects and their teams.
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8.6 De-escalation training for Food Projects

De-escalation training for foodbank staff and volunteers – delivered by Better Minds (£1,900)	
About the project:	In late 2025, foodbanks reported an increase in violent and aggressive behaviour. Alongside policy support and links to Community Safety teams, this funding enabled tailored de-escalation training so staff and volunteers could prevent escalation, respond safely and feel more confident managing challenging situations.
Outcomes:	Outcomes: • Three online de-escalation training sessions delivered in March, with 10 staff and volunteers attending live • Sessions recorded and, alongside the workbook, will be hosted on the Volunteer Centre Dorset website, creating a lasting, on-demand training resource for current and future volunteers • Increased confidence in managing challenging behaviour and prioritising staff and volunteer safety

	Learning already informing practice changes, including clearer signage, improved risk assessment of spaces and strengthened volunteer boundaries Participant feedback highlighted the value of sharing learning across teams to ensure supportive environments remain safe for staff and volunteers alike.
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8.7 Introduction to affordable food – Spring project

Affordable Food Club access for supported clients in Weymouth and Portland – Christians against Poverty (£1,100)	
About the project:	This project supported clients working with a debt-help charity (CAP) to move from crisis-based foodbank support into more resilient, preventative provision by introducing them to local affordable food clubs. Using vouchers and gentle encouragement, clients were supported to build a regular routine of attending over a month, easing financial pressure, improving access to healthy food and increasing social connection. This approach directly aligns with the Crisis and Resilience Fund (CRF) aim of supporting households to move away from crisis models towards longer-term resilience.
Outcomes:	- Positive client response, with appreciation for the support and welcoming experiences at food clubs - First-time engagement with affordable food clubs in Weymouth and the Portland pop-up, with several clients planning to attend regularly - Café vouchers supported social participation, including family outings during school holidays - Early evidence that supported introductions help people transition from foodbank use to more resilient food provision - The project provides a replicable model to strengthen resilience and reduce long-term reliance on crisis support, in line with CRF priorities

8.8 Affordable food and community meal provision in Wareham

The Welcome Table, Not Just Sundaes, Wareham (£5,000)	
About the project:	The Welcome Table, delivered by Not Just Sundaes in Wareham, provides a weekly, free two course community meal for people experiencing food insecurity and cost-of-living pressures. Alongside meeting immediate need,

	the project includes a linked Cook Club, delivered in partnership with the Friendly Food Club, to build longer-term resilience by increasing confidence and skills in preparing affordable, nutritious meals at home. The project is promoted through foodbanks, schools, the community fridge and family hub.
Outcomes:	Outcomes: • 659 meals provided over 17 weeks, supporting 189 households experiencing food insecurity • Reduced pressure on household food budgets and improved access to nutritious meals • Strong social impact, with guests reporting reduced isolation, increased confidence and improved family connection • A 6-week Cook Club built practical skills and confidence in affordable home cooking • High satisfaction (96% would return; 95% would recommend), demonstrating the value of combining immediate support with longer-term resilience building

8.9 Community Cook-up and affordable food access pilot – Bridport

Bridport Community Cook-up – Ripple Workshop (£1,760)	
About the project:	The Cost-of-Living Fund enabled Ripple Workshop CIC to pilot the Bridport Community Cook-up , delivering free, inclusive community cooking sessions alongside outreach activity. The project aimed to reduce isolation and cost-of-living pressures by bringing people together to prepare and share food, build skills, and access creative activities. Outreach was delivered across key local venues to engage residents who are isolated or hard to reach and to shape sessions around community needs.
Outcomes:	• Two free Community Cook-ups delivered, with 20+ participants at each, plus outreach engaging over 150 residents • Improved access to nutritious food for low-income households • Reduced isolation and improved wellbeing, with increased confidence and social connection reported • Strong peer support and inclusion across families, people with disabilities, pensioners and refugee households • A flexible, co-designed model that supports ongoing community resilience

8.10 Emergency support and affordable essentials provision – Open House, Shaftesbury

Emergency support and affordable essentials provision - Open House Shaftesbury (£5,000)	
About the project:	Open House Shaftesbury used Cost of Living Fund support to provide emergency aid and essential household items to residents facing poverty, homelessness and unstable housing. As a rural town without a foodbank operating locally , residents often need to travel to nearby towns to access support, which is costly and difficult for those without transport. This project therefore focused on meeting immediate needs locally through food parcels, energy top-ups, and cleaning and toiletry packs, alongside providing a warm, welcoming space and access to advice and employment support.
Outcomes:	• Weekly support provided to 30–40 residents per session, including families, pensioners and disabled people • Local emergency aid delivered through food parcels, energy top-ups and essential cleaning and toiletry packs • Reduced hardship for residents unable to travel to neighbouring towns for foodbank support • Improved dignity, wellbeing and access to a trusted warm space with advice and employment support • Fortnightly on-site DWP Work Coach sessions strengthened routes beyond crisis support

8.11 Pathways to Resilience event – April 2026

Pathways to Resilience partnership event – Dorset (£2,500)	
About the project:	Pathways to Resilience was a joint event with Citizens Advice, bringing together community food, health and advice partners from across the Dorset Council area following the launch of the Crisis and Resilience Fund. The event focused on sharing learning, strengthening partnerships and exploring how projects can move from crisis response towards longer-term resilience. It featured three practical workshops: • <i>From Crisis to Resilience</i> (Citizens Advice Central Dorset) • <i>Cooking for Resilience</i> (Friendly Food Club) • <i>Resilient Projects, Resilient Communities</i> (Volunteer Centre Dorset)
Outcomes	• Nearly 100 attendees registered, with a balanced mix of food, health and advice organisations • Strong focus on celebration, shared practice and partnership working across Dorset • Workshops provided practical tools to embed resilience within services and communities • Feedback gathered on the future shape of local networks, alongside an online survey, to inform next steps

9. Older People's Benefit Support

Project: Invest in information, advice and guidance services for vulnerable older residents to ensure they are receiving all the income they are entitled to (£60,000).	
About the project	This project targeted potentially vulnerable older people. We worked with six organisations who could add additional capacity – particularly with home visits to housebound residents. They met our governance criteria in that they all currently offer an advice service and had the necessary DBS and lone working policies in place. • The Lantern Trust (£10,000) • Age UK NSW (£7,500) • The YOU Trust (£10,000) • Island Community Action (£7,500) • Age Concern North Dorset (£10,000) • Citizens Advice Purbeck and East Dorset (£15,000) The majority of this work is physical assistance in completing applications for Attendance Allowance; Personal Independence Payments (PIP); Disability Living Allowance (DLA) and Pension Credit. There is a focus on <u>home visits</u> to most vulnerable older people to maximise benefit claims, improve financial stability, enhance referral pathways and increase awareness of entitlements and reduce need for crisis intervention.
Demographics	1,038 older people have received face to face support (mostly) within their own homes to access benefits they are entitled to – each visit takes an hour+ to complete - often longer.
Outcomes	To date, a large majority of these applications have been successful and released more than £1,501,968 of annualised income to Dorset residents (with additional claims still awaiting decisions).
Key outcomes from the	• Maximised benefit claims: Full entitlement checks and practical support with benefit applications.

support provided by the funded organisations	• Improved financial stability: Targeted assistance has enabled individuals to receive their full entitlement, significantly improving household incomes. • Enhanced professional capacity: Training and best-practice sharing have strengthened organisations' ability to support complex benefit claims. • Strong referral pathways: Improved links into dementia care, social prescribing, GP services and other trusted agencies, including signposting to services that reduce isolation. • Holistic support: Embedded advice within wider services, including help with debt reduction, rent arrears, housing access, community networks, health support, utility priority services, careline installations and food bank referrals.
Impacts	• Improved service delivery: Proactive follow-up has improved claim outcomes and identified additional support such as council tax relief and reduced utility costs. • Stronger sector knowledge: Best-practice sharing and training have improved wider understanding of the benefits system and strengthened partnership working. • Enhanced community engagement: Closer working with Primary Care Networks and community services has supported more targeted and integrated approaches. • Increased awareness of entitlements: Outreach activity has reached people previously unaware of available support, particularly those with limited digital access. • Earlier intervention: Improved identification of people at crisis point has enabled timely referrals and prevented escalation. Overall, the project has had a clear positive impact on financial stability, service coordination and early intervention for vulnerable older residents.

10. Children's Services - targeted priority programmes that support low-income families

Project: Increased food offer for children attending the holidays activities and food (HAF) programme (£30,000)	
About the project:	The additional funding had a significant positive impact on the delivery and reach of the Summer Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) programme. It enabled the creation of 1,000 additional places, directly responding to growing demand and helping to ease pressure on providers who were operating waiting lists for their camps.

	In total, just under 16,000 places were offered to children eligible for benefit-related free school meals, substantially increasing access to high-quality holiday provision for families who need it most. This scale of delivery helped ensure more children could benefit from structured, safe, and enriching activities during the summer holidays. Children engaged in a wide and diverse range of activities, including forest school sessions, football camps, performing arts workshops, and watersports. This variety supported physical health, creativity, confidence, and social development, while also enabling children to try new experiences they might not otherwise access. Crucially, every participating child received a hot, nutritious meal each day, contributing to improved food security and supporting children's health and wellbeing during the school holidays. For many families, this reduced financial pressure at a time when household costs are often higher.
Outcomes:	Overall, the project expanded capacity, increased inclusion, supported wellbeing, and responded effectively to local demand, delivering meaningful benefits for children and families across the programme area.

Appendix 3 – Infographic of the Impact of the Cost-of-Living Projects 2025-26

Cost of living support for Dorset residents in 2025/26

An additional **£50,000** invested to make **10** homes warmer and energy efficient for our disabled residents



£60,840 invested in **16** community transport schemes



We support an emergency and affordable food network and put **£245,000** into **15** foodbanks and **5** social supermarkets



We supported **477** households to buy food with emergency food vouchers



We provided **135** appliances such as cookers, washing machines and fridge freezers to **99** low-income households



1038 older people received face to face support to apply for entitled welfare benefits



We added £73,000



to provide **£531,298** to **783** households through the discretionary housing payment scheme

We supported **11** community food projects including community cooking and skills courses



We have helped **1,126** households facing homelessness



We funded an additional **1,000** places for children to enjoy free holiday activities through the holiday activities and food programme

We funded Citizens Advice specialist debt and energy advice support to help **1,001** clients with **2,799** issues



Income gains: **£443,033** achieved for clients
Debt written off: **£834,238** successfully cleared

* Households can be families with children, all adult households, single person households, pensioner households

*June 2026

Appendix 4 – Citizens Advice end of grant report 25-26 (project 3)

Report attached separately as a PDF

Appendix 4 – Community Transport Grant breakdown

Car Scheme	Area	Grant amount
Community Connections	North Dorset	£5,000
Cerne Abbas Voluntary car scheme	Mid Dorset	£300
Share & Care	Purbeck	£780
Wimborne Neighbour Car (Prima Life)	East Dorset	£2,400
SEDCAT	East/West Dorset & Weymouth & Portland	£5,000
Blackmore Stroke Club	North Dorset	£2,000
Gillingham Community Bus group - The Three Rivers Group	North Dorset	£2,500
Alderholt Parish Council	East Dorset	£2,500
Marnhull Village Care	North Dorset	£830
Bere Regis Parish Council	Mid Dorset	£2,500
T.R.I.P & Axe Vale	West Dorset	£2,500
Sherborne Town Council	North Dorset	£2,350
Friends of Penny Hill Practice Ferndown	East Dorset	£350
Wriggle Valley	North Dorset	£2,500
Dial a ride Wimborne	East Dorset	£2,500
Ealing Community Transport / Blandford Army Camp	North Dorset	£4,000
Ealing Community Transport	County Wide	£1,850
Ealing Community Transport	County Wide	£2,500
Ealing Community Transport	County Wide	£2,400
Ealing Community Transport	County Wide	£1,850
Ealing Community Transport	County Wide	£2,400
Ealing Community Transport	County Wide	£1,850
Ealing Community Transport	County Wide	£2,500
Ealing Community Transport	South Dorset	£1,500
Ealing Community Transport	South Dorset	£1,500
Ealing Community Transport	North Dorset	£1,500
Ealing Community Transport	North Dorset	£1,500
Ealing Community Transport	South Dorset	£1,500
		£60,860

Appendix 5 - Cost of Living and Crisis and Resilience Fund spend – 2026/27

No.	DC Directorate /VCSO lead	Project detail	Amount spent 2025-26	Amount 26-27		Total 2026/27
				CRF (Agreed)	Cost of Living Request 2026/27	
1	Adult Services - Housing – Homelessness prevention	1.Arrears/Rent in advance & deposit payments. This will support the team to negotiate with landlords to stop evictions from taking place or help to find new suitable accommodation. 2. Tenancy Sustainment. To maintain existing capacity of one of the tenancy sustainment officers to keep proactive negotiations with landlords 3. Food vouchers – These will continue to be used for when a resident/s present with nothing and can immediately be given by members of the housing team whilst other emergency support can prepared	£167,500 (CoL) + £200,000 (HSF) £377,500	£202,000	£157,000	£359,000
2	Citizens Advice	Continue funding x3.5 Debt caseworkers + volunteer support and supervision. To continue to fund the Cost of Living (debt and energy) caseworkers to support increased demand. Additional resource for volunteer training and supervision CA have demonstrated significant increase in need and the impact of these officers which supports our Revs & Bens teams	£210,000	£113,500.00	£103,200	£216,700
3	Corporate Services - Revenue and Benefits	Enhance Housing Payment Allowance Fund element of the Crisis and Resilience Fund Increase the allocated amount from national government grant available to R&B teams to support residents struggling with housing issues and threatened homelessness.	£73,000	£458,298	£89.800	£548,098

		Last year the £48,000 was spent by January due to increased demand. This support stops people from needing much more expensive interventions from the Homelessness Teams. <i>We are proposing an increase from last year of £31,800 (Note: in 24/25 we funded this area £100,000)</i>				
4	Corporate Development - Communities and Partnerships & VCS	Emergency and Affordable food security Demand for emergency and affordable food projects such as social supermarkets and foodbanks continues to increase beyond current capacity. This funding will allow continued support during this financial year to provide stability whilst we work alongside foodbanks to assist them to offer a broader range of wraparound support, helping residents build long-term financial resilience. This approach is closely aligned with the new Crisis and Resilience Fund.	£125,000 HSF + £120,000 CoL	£125,000	£100,000	£225,000
5	Older people's organisations supporting applications	Much of this work is physical assistance in completing applications for Attendance Allowance; Personal Independence Payments (PIP); Disability Living Allowance (DLA) and Pension Credit, often in their own homes. We propose carry on with this work with the following organisations (subject to satisfactory monitoring requirements): • Age UK NSW Dorset • Lantern Trust • Island Community Action • Age Concern North Dorset • You Trust	£75,000	£56,760	£20,000	£76,760

		Citizens Advice East Dorset and Purbeck				
6	Children's Services & VCSO	FY 25-26, funding enabled the provision of an additional 1,000 places as part of the summer HAF programme. Participants engaged in a diverse range of activities, including forest school sessions, football camps, performing arts workshops, and water sports. Every child received a hot, nutritious meal each day. We want to continue the pride additional support to this programme to increase capacity, particularly in rural and underserved areas.	£30,000		£30,000	£30,000
		Totals:		£955,558	£500,000	£1,455,558