

LONDON BOROUGH OF HAMMERSMITH & FULHAM

Report to: Policy and Oversight Board

Date: 12/12/2022

Subject: The Cost-of-Living Crisis

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Responsible Director: Lisa Redfern, Strategic Director of Social Care

Responsible Cabinet Member: Councillor Rebecca Harvey, Cabinet Member for Social Inclusion & Community Safety

SUMMARY

1. This report has been commissioned by Hammersmith and Fulham Council's ('H&F') Policy and Oversight Board to provide an update on the delivery of H&F's Cost of Living (COL) Response Programme. We are working with partners to deliver a bespoke and targeted programme of support to help residents and businesses through this crisis, building on an already successful track record of compassionate local government and keeping the cost of council tax and services low. This includes being the only council to have abolished charges for home care.
 2. In response to the crisis, H&F is building a strategic alliance with local voluntary and community sector organisations, resident groups, businesses and partners to deliver a community response, as was done so successfully during the Covid-19 pandemic. This report frames the key activities of the COL response programme through a Six Point Plan:
 - We've launched a funded package of support and kept costs down
 - We are building alliances across the borough to help tackle this crisis, together
 - We are targeting our resources to residents and families most in need
 - We've ensured residents can access help to maximise their income
 - We are building economic resilience and an inclusive local economy
 - We are pioneering new approaches to help residents beyond this crisis.
 3. H&Fs values underpin all the work, including doing things with, rather than to residents and listening to the views of residents across all that we do.
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RECOMMENDATIONS

4. That the Policy and Oversight Board note this report and provide comments and feedback to help shape and improve H&F response programme going forward.

WARDS AFFECTED: All

Our Values	Summary of how this report aligns to the H&F Values
Building shared prosperity	The COL Response Programme features a strategic ambition to build economic resilience and inclusion and draws on a wide range of activities to progress this.
Creating a compassionate council	H&F's Businesses Intelligence Service is working to ensure that we are targeting our resources to residents and families most in need, in line with our 'Six Point Plan.'
Doing things with residents, not to them	The ambition to build a strategic alliance between local partners will place resident's voices at the centre of the Council's long-term approach to tackling the COL crisis.
Being ruthlessly financially efficient	H&F's Response Programme has been delivered with very limited additional expenditure, making best use of existing resources to work flexibly across the organisation.
Taking pride in H&F	H&F's Response Programme focuses on helping our most vulnerable residents and strengthening partnerships locally to build a stronger, happier and more resilient borough.
Rising to the challenge of the climate and ecological emergency	Home retrofitting and efficiency improvements form a key part of the programme, which helps residents manage through energy price changes, and keep emissions low.

Background Papers Used in Preparing This Report: None

BACKGROUND

5. Since late 2021, the UK has experienced a significant rise in the cost-of-living for people and businesses that has not been witnessed since the 1980s. Inflation currently stands at 11% and is the top issue of concern for the public.¹ The cost of essentials such as food, energy and fuel have increased sharply, and are predicted to remain high. The rising costs for essential goods are outstripping many people's income growth, causing a crisis where many residents are having to make difficult choices about how they spend their income.
6. Ninety percent of Londoners reported an increase in their cost of living in recent months,² and although the crisis will impact everyone, research shows that it will be felt most severely by lower income households. Households with lower incomes typically pay more for essential goods and services and spend a larger proportion of their income on energy, transport and housing, meaning the rate of inflation is often higher for them. Consequently, there is a risk that some people may fall into food insecurity, fuel poverty and debt, and the broader challenges that come with it.³
7. HM Government has provided limited funding for local government to help tackle the crisis, but H&F is doing everything it can to support residents. We have moved

¹ Ipsos Mori, 2022. Ipsos Issues Index: August. [Available here.](#)

² Watson, J. Leaser, R. Smith, Y. Rock, C. Fong, B. Wilson, M. 'The rising cost of living and its effects on Londoners', *London Datastore*, (August 2022). [Available here](#)

³ 'Cost-of-living crisis threat of 'pandemic proportions' to mental health, warns UK's leading psychiatrist' *Royal College of Psychiatrists*, (June 2022). [Available here](#)

quickly to use our limited powers and resource to deliver a wide-ranging package of support. New initiatives have been developed to help residents, and we are building a community response through a local alliance of local people and partners. This is in addition to the continued long-term provision of wide ranging statutory and discretionary services, helping to keep costs and taxes low, whilst delivering high quality services for all.

OUR STRATEGIC RESPONSE

8. In summer 2022, H&F's COL response was rapidly mobilised, drawing in services from across the Council. The programme is steered by a Working Group, chaired by the Strategic Director of Social Care and includes senior officers from across the Council. H&F's response is being led by the Cabinet Member for Social Inclusion and Community Safety, with close collaboration with several other cabinet members.
9. Following a systematic review of best practice approaches to tackling the crisis, and engagement with other organisations, H&F has based its response on building local financial resilience and helping residents to maximise their income, minimise costs, and reduce debt; in many cases, working together with partners. Within this overall mission, five strategic objectives were developed to drive delivery:
 - Build a place-based alliance that creates a financially resilient and inclusive borough for everyone, drawing on our shared strengths across community, business, and anchor organisations.
 - Increase access to support through a 'no wrong door' and integrated approach to the provision of advice and support, to help people make the most of the income they have.
 - Promote uptake of key support services and grants by residents
 - Build economic resilience and financial inclusion across the borough to drive a thriving economic recovery.
 - Pioneer a bespoke programme of council led interventions and initiatives to support residents through the crisis, building on our strong track record of delivery for residents.
10. H&F's response has been underpinned by the effective use of business intelligence and data insight. Officers are utilising a strategic evidence base and monthly data dashboard to track key indicators relating to the COL crisis, and this is regularly reviewed to ensure activities continue to deliver in a bespoke and targeted way.
11. Programme delivery has also been supported by good governance practices, with lead officers for key workstreams, terms of reference, regular reporting, and project specific task and finish groups. Good project and programme management practices have been supported through the Council's Corporate Policy and Programme Management Office.
12. H&F cannot tackle this crisis on our own. We are therefore proactively engaging and working with the community, local businesses and anchor institutions to co-produce a response together. H&F must be outward facing, and listen to the needs of residents, and that principle will sit at the centre of the response going forward. The Council is, and will continue, to work with the extraordinary and diverse community and business

sectors to consolidate strengths, knowledge and resources to build holistic and community led solutions to the crisis.

13. The powers and resources H&F has to help residents through the crisis are limited. Central government support is welcomed, but it does not go far enough or promote the long-term planning that this crisis requires, as government schemes and grants are often for just a few months ahead. Additional initiatives that the Government requires the Council to administer also need to be fully funded upfront. An example of this is the Council Tax Energy Rebate where the Council has received limited administrative funding for the scheme which does not cover its additional costs, and to date there has been no commitment to provide additional funding.
14. Building in feedback from recent workshops, H&F will assess the scope for undertaking lobbying efforts for improved support from HM Government. A few areas for example might include; doing more to ensure HM Government energy bill support is reaching households on pre-payment meters, providing councils with greater fiscal freedom and control over local spending, and strengthening local powers to retrofit buildings to improve energy efficiency and save households money.

OUR SIX POINT PLAN

15. Beyond many of the long-term initiatives that the Council leads to support residents, we have gone further to bolster our support, and developed additional interventions following engagements with partners. A Six Point Plan, set out below, identifies some of the key activities within the response programme.

POINT 1: We've launched a funded package of support and kept costs down

16. H&F has a strong track record of keeping costs down, tax and rents low, and being ruthlessly efficient in managing expenditure. In 2022, H&F froze Council Tax, one of only two London boroughs to do this, following years of low or no tax rises. This year, H&F also froze charges in adult social care, children's services and housing to protect residents' incomes, and distributed £2.8m worth of household support funds (HSF) from central government to residents most in need. HM Government recently committed to extend HSF for a further year to March 2024.
17. Our Council Tax Support scheme provides 100% support towards Council Tax for those on the lowest incomes. This is a more compassionate offer than many other local authorities who offer 80% support. H&F operates a discretionary housing payment scheme for people suffering hardship and provides one-off Local Support Payments (LSP) to help residents in crisis. The average LSP in October 2022 was £500 across 50 residents in that month. H&F's Welfare Benefits Team provides welfare rights and debt advice to council tenants, referring people to support where necessary.
18. Our partnership with the Fuel Bank Foundation provides fuel top-up vouchers for households on pre-payment meters who are at risk of disconnection. This partnership provides £49 fuel vouchers to top-up meters, up from £30 from earlier in 2022. From December 2021 to October 2022, 759 vouchers have supported 2,037 people.

POINT 2: We are building alliances to help tackle this crisis, together

19. Local communities want to help, and H&F is building new partnerships and learning from the successes of the community response during the Covid-19 pandemic, to ensure there is a joined up and robust network of support across the borough. To start building an alliance of support, H&F held a conference on 30 November with voluntary and community organisations and businesses, and a workshop on 7 October, to get widespread input and co-production of the way forward. This has also been supported by separate engagements with the H&F Business Network, the Borough Resilience Forum, Faith Forum, Housing Forum, health partners and local voluntary and community sector organisations to help inform H&F's early response.
20. H&F provides £3m in grants to local third sector organisations each year to provide services that local people rely on, many of which provide support to those most severely impacted by the COL crisis. A further £2.3million was recently invested into the Nourish project which opened in 2021 and has served over 27,000 meals and provided 463 food education and community events, including learn to cook and bicycle repair services. Officers are working with the H&F Foodbank to develop a Social Supermarket, and H&F continues to fund the Foodbank so residents and families can get emergency food parcels, balanced meals, advice and help.
21. Financial stability has been provided for advice services through the Council's 10-year grants to H&F Citizens Advice, H&F Law Centre, and Action on Disability, so they can focus on providing support. H&F has partnered with Green Doctors, who provide a one stop advice shop for home insulation, energy efficiency and support to pay bills – with hundreds of free home energy consultations for residents.
22. A new network of warm welcoming spaces has been set up in partnership with local organisations, where residents can go to keep busy, rest, socialise and cook. Our network of warm hubs, set out online and in the forthcoming winter booklet to all households, features four warm spaces with food and activities, in addition to our five libraries which are open to anyone, and several other partner led warm hubs. Demand will be monitored closely to assess uptake and gather feedback to ensure our warm hub provision can remain flexible to the needs to residents. The H&F managed hubs include:
- Sands End Arts & Community Centre
 - Our Lady of Fatima Church
 - Old Oak community Centre
 - Earls Court Community Hub.
23. Officers are soon also commencing outreach into the community with partners through pop-up advice stalls in different locations.
24. **POINT 3: We are targeting our resources to residents and families most in need**
25. Research shows that families and single parents on low incomes are being hard hit by the COL crisis. H&F has targeted support by providing free school meals and clothing grants to alleviate costs for families who are financially strained. The number of students receiving free school meals has risen by more than a third over the past five years. Holiday hunger is being tackled by H&F providing vouchers to families in need over Christmas, supporting over 6,700 children and young people with the cost

of food. This builds on the council's Holiday Activity and Food programme providing over 3,600 spaces of free engaging activity and food. Furthermore, H&F is providing £11k of funding through the HSF to support up to 500 of the borough's elderly and vulnerable residents with a meal and small present this Christmas, working in partnership with H&F Giving.

26. Pension age residents are particularly vulnerable, and that is why home care continues to be free; the only Council in the country to do this, saving residents on average £13,000 per year. We are also promoting the uptake of pension credit, which despite eligibility, often goes unclaimed, and acts as a gateway to other types of support. H&F's Adult Social Care offers a range of free day services (by referral) for adults with learning difficulties, mental health issues and disabilities, giving residents opportunities to develop skills for independence, including managing finances.
27. Our Business Intelligence Service has developed a 'COL risk index' to help identify areas within the borough most at risk (Appendix 1), and this will inform interventions such as where warm activity hubs and pop-up advice stalls will be located. Insight is also being used to identify households on housing benefit that are not entitled to central government support, and H&F has launched a local £200 COL Payment targeted specifically at those households.
28. Similar data was also used to identify households eligible for the Greater London Authority's (GLA) Warmer Homes Scheme to improve home efficiency. A taskforce was established to knock on nearly 1,000 doors to raise awareness and encourage applications to the scheme.
29. Following the lifting of the Government's ban on evictions, many councils are seeing an increase in homeless presentations compared to pre-pandemic levels, which is worsened by the supply of affordable privately rented homes decreasing across London. H&F has helped to reduce the number of households in temporary accommodation by over 20% in the last four years through our Temporary Accommodation Reduction Strategy.
30. We are also continuing our long-standing policy of not placing children and their families in Bed and Breakfast accommodation. The H&F Link team, the commissioned single homeless pathway, the 'Get Connected' pilot, discretionary housing payments and the vulnerable renters funding all provide additional support for residents at risk or in need. Outcomes from this work so far in 2022/23 include 71 private tenants whose tenancy was at risk have had their homelessness prevented, and 32 private tenants whose tenancy was at risk are sustaining their tenancies.

PART 4: We've ensured residents can access help to maximise their income and keep costs down

31. H&F is undertaking a coordinated campaign to boost access and uptake to key services through social media, printed materials, and face to face engagements. This outreach is being spearheaded by a comprehensive online support hub on H&F's webpage which has a catalogue of support services, and a winter booklet with COL advice that will be sent to all 95,000 households in the borough in December.
32. We have also redirected officers to support a new COL advice team, with a new freephone advice line (0800 917 6994) for residents, who are helping residents to

access the support they need. These advisors are working closely with key partners, and the service will soon be promoted via the pop-up advice stalls and online support hub. Officers are liaising with local advice providers to explore new processes to refer residents between support services. For those who prefer it, residents will be able to speak with the advice team via drop-in appointments at 145 King St in the new year.

33. Library staff are being trained to signpost residents to key services, and broader awareness training is being rolled out to Council staff, to help staff identify when and how to support residents. Housing Officers are engaging with residents in their homes to carry out fire safety checks, check on wellbeing, and signpost to services.

PART 5: We are building economic resilience and an inclusive economy

34. The COL crisis is also impacting on local businesses and their staff. Footfall and spending within key business districts has reduced compared to last year. Businesses have seen large increases in their energy costs, together with supply chain challenges and rising interest rates. H&F's Economic Development service has taken immediate action to provide support and advice to local businesses. A [Cost of Doing Business](#) webpage has been created to act as a central landing page for businesses. This is being supported by a Cost of Doing Business edition of the Business Connects Newsletter, communication across social media, and through a new [guide for SMEs](#), with advice on how to lower energy use.
35. A partnership has been set up with [Advantage Utilities](#) who offer free energy efficiency assessments for any business in the borough, to help reduce consumption and costs. H&F is also investing in recruiting new *Climate & Business Engagement Officers*, who will take an active role working with businesses to support their transition to low-carbon energy, saving energy and the environment.
36. Economic Development is also increasing the 1-2-1 business advice offer with two additional advisors along with training to build business resilience and navigate the cost of doing business. This includes professional expertise in debt management, business continuity planning, carbon reduction, marketing, and digital skills. The H&F Business Desk and helpline remain the first port of call for all business enquiries.
37. H&F is also taking forward a range of initiatives to build economic resilience:
- providing a course on digital marketing training for businesses.
 - investing in the [Online High Street](#) e-commerce platform which provides an eco-friendly home delivery service aimed at helping local independent businesses.
 - offering free monthly networking opportunities for small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) in the borough
 - providing knowledge and skills to help businesses submit and win tenders through the Ready to Supply Programme.
 - providing pre-employment support to help connect local people to local jobs
 - continuing the successful Shop Local campaign, to support high streets.
38. Capacity within H&F Works (previously WorkZone) has been increased using European Social Fund funding to provide additional support for residents. The team are delivering face to face activities across the borough including at Job Centres, Libraries, the Adult Learning Centre and Housing Associations. H&F Works has

launched a website to provide residents with improved access to job opportunities, apprenticeships, and training, with the ability to request employability support.

39. The Adult Learning & Skills Service's (ALSS) are continuing to help our most vulnerable residents access Adult Learning courses, using the Discretionary Learner Support Fund (DLSF) and Hardship Funds. ALSS will also continue to support our residents to upskill, gain national qualifications and progress into employment.
40. ALSS has been allocated an extra £214,000 by the GLA over 3 years to deliver the national Multiply Programme in mathematics and numeracy. ALSS are currently recruiting a Multiply Programme Leader, which will be a critical role in leading our Multiply Programme, delivering skills to both staff, residents, and the wider community. H&F will also work with local organizations such as Citizens Advice to provide 'Money Matters' and Financial Capability courses.

PART 6: We are pioneering new approaches to help residents beyond this crisis.

41. In the longer term, H&F will work with partners to plan for a different future, using data insight and resident engagement to help shape new innovative strategies that will build prosperity across the borough. The ambitions set out in the recently published H&F Business Objectives 2022/23 report demonstrates H&F's broader commitments in this area.
42. As part of the COL response programme, H&F will be working with partners across different sectors in developing a new Financial Inclusion Strategy that will boost residents access to affordable credit, financial services, and advice. This will involve taking a strategic approach to build financial understanding, capability, and resilience across the borough, and directly tackle illegal lending, barriers to employment, and the premium that many residents pay for being unable to access the financial support they need.
43. We are also taking forward a new Fuel Poverty Strategy to tackle the rise in local fuel poverty, which sits above the national average, and has been exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic and the COL crisis. This strategy will focus on helping residents to maximise the efficiency of their homes, and secure wider grants and support. To help tackle food inequality, a new Food Strategy is also being co-produced with partners to ensure no-one goes hungry and everyone can eat healthily. This strategy builds on H&F's broader support for the H&F Foodbank and Nourish Hub project.
44. The Council will soon renew our ground-breaking Industrial Strategy and continue to support businesses in the emerging economic eco-system to deliver new jobs in Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) industries, medicine, media and the arts in the borough.
45. H&F is also committed to having housing assets that residents can be proud of. The next 12 years will see significant investment in the housing stock following agreement of the Housing Revenue Account Asset Management Capital Strategy. The programme includes over £100m investment in improving the efficiency of residents' council homes, cutting carbon emissions in the process. Additionally, the long-term housing development programme will enable through the planning system 3,000 new

energy efficient affordable homes to be built or underway in the next 4 years, paving the way for a more resilient future that is less affected by energy markets.

46. The strategic approach to community and third sector engagement will be renewed, focusing on making community engagement and co-production even more central to decisions affecting residents, and making better use of the knowledge, skills and assets within the borough. The new COL Alliance itself will be a key part of this.

OUR PLAN GOING FORWARDS

47. H&F will deliver the Six Point Plan over the 2022/23 winter period as set out in this paper, and tackling this crisis will remain a priority beyond this. H&F's response programme will continue to be guided by data insight, resident engagement and co-production principles, and be supported by robust governance, scrutiny, and councillor oversight.
48. Officers will work with lead Cabinet Members to formally review delivery of the programme before April 2023 and plan for the future. This will provide an opportunity to reflect on the changing national economic picture, evaluate delivery of the response programme over the winter, and identify any lessons to inform future work. It is also expected that the Alliance between local partners would have developed further, and feedback can be sought through that forum to shape next steps.

Appendix 1 – COL Impact Index