



## Agenda for Poverty Working Panel Monday, 18th March, 2024, 10.00 am

### Members of Poverty Working Panel

Councillors: P Arnott, M Chapman, B Collins, M Goodman,  
D Haggerty, J Heath, D Ledger (Chair), M Martin, M Rixson and  
S Smith

**Venue:** Online via the Zoom app

**Contact:** Sarah James;

01395 519978 Email: [sjames@eastdevon.gov.uk](mailto:sjames@eastdevon.gov.uk)

(or group number 01395 517546)

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East Devon District Council  
Blackdown House  
Border Road  
Heathpark Industrial Estate  
Honiton  
EX14 1EJ

DX 48808 HONITON

Tel: 01404 515616

[www.eastdevon.gov.uk](http://www.eastdevon.gov.uk)

- 1 Apologies
- 2 Minutes of the previous meeting held on 13 November 2023 (Pages 2 - 4)
- 3 Declarations of interest  
Guidance is available online to Councillors on making [declarations of interest](#)
- 4 Public speaking  
Information on [public speaking is available online.](#)
- 5 Devon Communities Together (Voluntary, Community & Social Enterprise) presentation
- 6 Household Support Fund update (Pages 5 - 8)
- 7 Pilot project with Financial Resilience and Private Sector Housing - Improving homes for low-income families

Members of the public exercising their right to speak during Public Speaking will be recorded.

[Decision making and equalities](#)

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**EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL****Minutes of the meeting of Poverty Working Panel held at Online via the Zoom app on 13 November 2023****Attendance list at end of document**

The meeting started at 10.00 am and ended at 12.07 pm

**8 Minutes of the previous meeting held on 26 June 2023**

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 26 June 2023 were noted as a true and accurate record.

**9 Declarations of interest**

Cllr M Goodman: Minute 11; Affects Non-Registerable Interest: He works closely with the Sid Valley Food Bank and the Benefits Manager on the Christmas appeal for Sidmouth.

**10 Public speaking**

No members of the public had registered to speak at the meeting.

**11 How East Devon are working with partners towards building the financial resilience of our residents - presentations by the Financial Resilience and Private Sector Housing Teams and some of our key partners**

The Benefits and Financial Resilience Manager introduced this item which provided an overview of how the Council supports the district's more vulnerable residents through collaborative partnership working both internally and with external partners.

Members saw presentations from the following departments and agencies, detailing at length how they work holistically to support residents with examples of outcomes and residents feedback, and an outline of the shared work going forward:

- Millie Harris, Financial Resilience Team, EDDC
- Jody Harding, Private Sector Housing, EDDC
- Tara Bowers, Exeter Community Energy
- Lorraine Whiting, South West Water
- Dean Stewart, Citizens Advice East Devon

The Benefits and Financial Resilience Manager thanked all partners for their contribution to the meeting and for their continuing work with the Council.

Discussion and clarification included the following points:

- Private landlords are expected to inspect and maintain their properties but Private Sector Housing have wide-ranging powers to intervene in the event that the properties are not adequately maintained.
- The Private Sector Housing team currently has a full complement of Officers, and resources are managed to deal with damp and mould issues during the winter season, and project works in the spring and summer. There have been fewer referrals for damp and mould issues than would be expected for the time of year however, suggesting that residents may be reluctant to report their landlords for fear of potentially losing their homes.

- A Cranbrook Ward Member raised that there are Cranbrook residents with heat provision from Eon Heat who are potentially in fuel poverty, and she would like to explore what more can be done to raise awareness in Cranbrook of the help that is available. It was confirmed that the Financial Resilience Team have referral links with the food bank in Cranbrook, and Eon Heat does come up in discussions with residents.
- Citizens Advice ran a campaign last year about loan sharks. Going forward, they are looking to set up a Preventative Debt team, to be proactive in the community about how to manage a budget and avoid pitfalls.
- Citizens Advice advisors carry out deep-dive work with specific vulnerable people who are not good at managing their finances, in instances where a visit to the office is not enough, to carry out more detailed and significant work with those who most need it. This can include practical assistance with setting up online banking and direct debits.
- The Revenues and Benefits team hope to be in a position to bring data to a future Working Panel meeting around the percentage of people who no longer need help, due to the success of the work that has been done to support them.
- Information is available on the Council's website concerning financial help, and providing links to other websites and resources. Available support is also promoted via social media posts, and by way of press releases to reach residents who are digitally excluded.
- Project Food, funded by Devon County Council, supports people with learning cooking skills and how to prepare nutritious meals on a budget.

The Chair thanked all speakers for their presentations, which highlighted the valuable work being carried out.

## 12 **East Devon Poverty Actions Annual Review 2022-2023**

The Public Health Project Officer presented the Annual Review of the first year of East Devon's Poverty Actions, explaining that the Poverty Working Panel developed a Poverty Strategy and an Action Plan, published in 2021, to inspire as well as to celebrate and share good work. The actions were not intended to be done all at once or to be too onerous for already busy teams.

The 2021 Action Plan was structured around five objectives with the following themes:

- Helping people on low incomes
- Strengthening families and communities
- Promoting an inclusive economy
- Addressing the high cost of housing
- Improving health outcomes for people on low incomes

The Annual Review was structured around the same aforementioned themes and the Public Health Project Officer provided a range of examples demonstrating the contribution and care that the Council's services have made towards poverty reduction in the district. The actions from the 2021 Action Plan were not all completed, and the expectation was that they would be delivered over time, dependent on capacity.

It was noted that the 2021 Action Plan was a large document and with the agreement of the Working Panel, a simplified Action Plan has been published for 2023-24 which reflects the same five strategic objectives and is structured service by service, to streamline reporting for future annual reviews.

The Working Panel were asked to approve the Annual Review, upon which the Public Health Project Officer will arrange for it to be published online alongside the Action Plan for 2023-24.

In discussion, one Member noted that some of the excellent work that has been done in delivering the 2021 Action Plan will not have been captured because it is such a weighty document, and the simpler Action Plan for 2023-24 is more appropriate, going forward.

In a vote, Working Panel Members approved the Annual Review.

The Chair thanked the Public Health Project Officer for her work in liaising with services for the purposes of delivering the review.

**Attendance List**

**Councillors present:**

M Chapman  
M Goodman  
D Ledger (Chair)  
M Martin  
S Smith

**Councillors also present (for some or all the meeting)**

K Bloxham  
P Faithfull  
E Rylance

**Officers in attendance:**

Sharon Church, Benefits Manager  
Jody Harding, Principal Environmental Health Officer  
Sarah James, Democratic Services Officer  
Libby Jarrett, Assistant Director Revenues, Benefits, Corporate Customer Access, Fraud & Compliance  
Sarah Jenkins, Democratic Services Officer  
Helen Wharam, Public Health Project Officer

**Councillor apologies:**

P Arnott  
B Collins  
D Haggerty  
J Heath  
M Rixson

Chair: .....

Date: .....



## Poverty Panel Meeting 18 March 2024

### Briefing Paper: Household Support Fund

#### 1.0 Background

The Household Support Fund (HSF) has been in place since 1 October 2021 when it was announced that funding would be made available to provide help with the global inflationary challenges and the significantly rising cost of living.

HSF schemes have been delivered under a Devon wide framework agreed by Devon County Council (DCC) and other Devon districts who meet on a regular basis to discuss deployment of the fund. This ensures that we are all approaching administering the scheme in the same way, whilst allowing for local needs based on the demographics of each area.

We are currently under our fourth HSF scheme that covers the period 01 April 2023 to 31 March 2024.

At the Cabinet meeting on 29 March 2023 members agreed the policy to administer the £631,549.00 allocated to East Devon District Council.

#### 2.0 Deployment of the Fund

As agreed with DCC and the Devon Local Authorities group the fund for 2023/24 was separated into two periods;

- For the period 1 April 2024 to 30 September 2024 £284,188 (45%)
- For the period 1 October 2023 to 31 March 2024 £347,341 (55%)

##### 01 April 2023 to 30 September 2023

The fund is used to provide targeted support and for open applications.

Benefit records were used to identify all residents in receipt of Housing Benefit (HB) and/or Council Tax Reduction (CTR) to receive a one-off payment of £150.00, provided they had not already received a cost-of-living payment from the government.

1364 residents were targeted for the £150 support with 1157 (84.82%) making an application and receiving the payment a total of £173,550.00.

Follow up calls were made to residents who did not make an application. Officer support provided by Customer Services and the Benefits team was put into place for those residents who were not able to complete their on-line application themselves.

The open applications process allowed for any residents who we had not targeted a payment to. This was necessary as not all residents who would be entitled to HB or CTR have made a claim for one of these benefits.

For this period 590 applications were made with a total of £106,352.28 awarded.

Total awarded under scheme for period April to September - **£279,902.28.**

Remaining £4,285.72 carried forward to be used for October to March allocation.

Period 1 October 2024 to 32 March 2024

The fund was again used for targeted support and open applications.

The policy was updated to reflect the groups that were being targeted.

- A payment of £350 for any household with one of the monitored groups\*\* present in receipt of HB and/or CTR and property is EPC rated E or below.
- A payment of £300 for any household with one of the monitored groups present in receipt of HB and/or CTR.
- A payment of £180 for any household in receipt of HB or receiving CTR in income band 1.

\*\* Monitored groups include households where children, residents receiving a disability payment, carers and previous serving members of the armed forces are resident in the household.

1010 households from the above groups have received a letter advising them they can receive a payment.

To date £127,360.00 has been claimed. We are still receiving applications and are in the process of making payments. Follow up calls will be made as part of normal practice to ensure that as many as residents as possible receive their award.

From the 1 October 2023 to 07 March 2024 631 households totalling £114,150.40 were made from open applications.

Total spend to 07 March 2024 = £241,500.40

Remaining budget - £105,840.60.

We anticipate all funding will be used by 31 March 2024.

Our direct application process remains open as we still have our cost-of-living hardship funds available.

Payments for targeted support have been and will continue to be made by BACs or by Post Office vouchers.

### 3.0 Make-up of awards

The following table shows the reasons for awards being made when a resident has made a claim for support through the open application process.

	<b>Food</b>	<b>Energy &amp; Water</b>	<b>Essentials linked to Energy &amp; Water</b>	<b>Wider Essentials</b>	<b>Housing Costs</b>
<b>Spend</b>	£143,833.00	£16,133.16	£28,708.04	£31,065.44	£763.04
<b>Volumes</b>	941	175	35	68	2

### 4.0 Future Support

In the 2024 Spring Budget the chancellor announced a further 6 months of Household Support Fund.

DCC are still awaiting details of the funding and are therefore unable to provide confirmation of the amounts that we will be given to administer. It is expected that Devon Local Authorities will be given approximately 40% of the funding to administer to their residents.

How the fund will be administered will depend on any criteria placed on the funding by central government. If there are no changes then it is likely that previous frameworks will apply to the fifth round of funding.

Further details of the allocations that EDDC will receive and the criteria for administering this support will be provided once received.

### 5.0 Other Considerations

We received £63,516 from Devon County Council to help low-income households through their Economic Vulnerability Fund. This funding must be spent by 31 March 2024. This funding is being used to support the 349 residents who did not get a government cost of living payment or a payment from our HSF. These residents will receive a £180.00 to ensure that this funding is supporting East Devon's residents.

The future of the Household Support Fund beyond the end of September 2024 is currently unknown. Future announcements will largely depend on the political landscape and whether there will be an easing of the current cost of living crisis.

EDDC have their own cost of living hardship fund which we are currently looking at deploying in a pro-active way in conjuncture with Private Sector Housing. This pilot project is still in it's very early days but seeks to help low-income households living in accommodation that is sub-standard, e.g. suffering from damp and mould, by way of providing funding for improvements that are not able to be funded by other grants available.

We are also currently working with Devon Communities Together to look at how we can reach households who we are not currently engaging with, or who do not know of the financial support available.

We also continue to work with the voluntary sector to ensure that our residents are making the most of the opportunities available that have been set up to support them within their local communities.

## **6.0 Summary**

As can be seen there are several ways in which EDDC supports their residents and whilst government funding beyond September 2024 is uncertain, we will continue to work towards accessing other means of support.

Once details of the fifth HSF are received, we will bring a report to Cabinet proposing how this funding could be deployed.