

## Energy Briefing Update for Poverty Panel Meeting – 21 March 2022

### Briefing by:

Sharon Church - Introduction and Household Support Fund (HSF)

Martin Prew - Private Sector Housing involvement and outcomes

Jody Harding - Wider role of Private Sector housing; partnership working with Exeter Community Energy (ECO) and engagement

Libby Jarrett – Council Tax (Energy) Rebate and Summary

### 1. Introduction

Financial Resilience (FR) team, Private Sector Housing (PSH) and Exeter Community Energy are working in partnership

- Very aware that there is a pressure on household income, especially around energy costs and this is likely to continue in the near future.
- Have continued to work in partnership together and build upon what we have already developed to ensure that we are supporting as many of our residents as possible.
- The Financial Resilience Team refer cases across to ECO via PSH to help with practical ways that energy costs can be reduced.
- Following members feedback we have created the Hub on website and work in progress.

### 2. Outcomes using the Household Support Fund (HSF) in relation to energy and fuel poverty whilst reflecting wider financial resilience

- The HSF up to 4 March 2022 has paid £34,054.45 to provide energy and water costs and £6,221.04 for essentials linked to energy and water to 326 households.
- Of 268 cases that require further financial resilience work 94 (20.7%) approached us as they advised they were unable to afford energy for their homes.
- We are still working on updating the data on the poverty dashboard but we have so far referred 149 households to ECO.
- 117 of these have engaged with ECO.
- To date the total saving ECO have found for residents is £93,808.38 for 80 households.
- Savings for households vary in amounts from £20.00 through to just under £21,000.
- White goods and anything linked to keeping properties warm are funded through the household support fund if they are linked to energy, e.g. old fridges that are broken or cost a lot to run are funded out of the household support fund if ECO identify this as a requirement. This was agreed when LEAP (Local Energy Advice Partnership) funding ran out.
- If ECO and PSH can't access full funding HSF looks at the shortfall.
- Advice ranges from tips to only boiling kettle with what water is needed through to accessing LAD1 funding.
- Alongside working with ECO we are still working with Citizens Advice East Devon to help with budgeting, debt advice, help with DWP benefits and appeals.
- PSH carry out EPC (Energy Performance Certificate) checks on properties. We are looking at how we can do more around this area as a partnership.
- Council owned property with issues are passed over to repairs team to deal with.
- Both FR and PSH teams link in with repairs and mental health officer in Housing to monitor and liaise to ensure work completed.
- PSH contact all referrals from home owners and landlords to discuss the possibility of extra funding that ECO can't access.

- PSH also help Housing Association and private renters with complaints if difficulties with work being carried out.
- Referrals work both ways as either one of the three teams may have the initial contact so with residents permission will feed into the other teams when required.
- The three teams have regular meetings to discuss issues and where we can improve or expand our support, e.g. water savings devices.

### 3. Environmental Health (EH) Private Sector Housing

The wider role of EH Private Sector Housing in housing related forms of poverty

#### Increase availability

- Bringing empty homes back into use

#### Increase quality

- Improving housing quality through inspections; advice; enforcement and funding in the private rented sector.
- Advising and enforcement on the Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards and intelligence sharing with Trading Standards
- Spending £1mn Better Care Fund to keep residents in their own homes through adaptations and loans.
- Regulating the private rented sector through licensing regime of houses in multiple occupation and residential park homes and caravan sites.

#### Reducing Costs

- Reducing direct housing costs through energy efficiency measures to reduce fuel poverty for tenants and owner occupiers promoting Green home grants Cosy Devon
- Discretionary grants for ECO flex top ups
- Partnership working with Financial Resilience Team and ECOE

### 4. Future engagement with residents and communities

- Engagement with the Housing Associations already underway by ECOE
- Sustainable warmth funding for retrofit grants for insulating properties and renewables
- Sustaining tenancies by working with Landlord Liaison team
- Further partnership working
- Reporting key measure to the poverty dashboard
- Informing residents through promotion provided by East Devon and working with climate change officer. E.G flyer being sent with all the letters regarding the energy rebate relief scheme.
- Energy champions within communities and parishes to signpost residents
- Promote ECOE advice roadshows and drop -ins such as at Honiton Library with Honiton Healthy Matters.
  - Social media campaigns and Youtube films by Catherine Causley and Communication team
  - Promote residents to sign up to Residents Newsletter to provide advice and top tips on energy efficiency, financial resilience work and funding.
  - Develop billing and news items through the East Devon App
  - On going development of website (Hub)
  - Developing a leaflet to promote Financial resilience/energy education to be sent as part of Council Tax (Energy) Rebate to circa 47K eligible residents
  - Members to encourage and engage via newsletter

## 5. Energy Bills Rebate

- On 3<sup>rd</sup> Feb government announced a package of support known as the Energy Bills Rebate to help households with rising energy bills. This includes the £150 Council Tax Rebate which billing authorities are responsible for administering. Alongside this there will be a £200 discount on energy bills this autumn for domestic electricity customers which will be paid back automatically over the next 5 years.
- Two parts – main scheme and a discretionary scheme. Government guidance available here: [The council tax rebate 2022-23 – billing authority guidance - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/guidance/council-tax-rebate-2022-23-billing-authority-guidance)

### 5a Council Tax Rebate Main scheme – Initial funding £7,116,750

- Eligible properties are those in bands A – D. Plus properties in Band E in receipt of the disabled band reduction. Excludes empty properties and second homes.
- Certain exempt occupied properties – Class N, S, U & W\* are eligible
- Must be in occupation as at 1 April 2022
- Only one payment per household regardless of number of occupants.
- Where we hold a live Direct Debit (DD) & this matches the council tax liable person payment will be automatically paid into their bank account.
- Application process being developed for those not paying on DD as will need to apply. Can elect to have the payment credited to the Council Tax account.
- Scheme closes 30 September 2022

\*Class N = properties occupied solely by students.

Class S = properties occupied only by persons under 18.

Class U = dwelling only occupied by people who are classed as “severely mentally impaired”

Class W = annexes occupied by dependant relatives.

In East Devon Approximately 47K households will benefit from this support.

### 5b. Council Tax Rebate Discretionary Scheme – allocated £269,850 funding

- Allocations need to be spent by 30 November 2022. Any remaining funding to be repaid to government.
- If we provide same level of payment (£150) then can support 1,792 households.
- Local authorities to design their own local scheme
- Support could be targeted at those in higher bands (E to H) or to provide carefully targeted ‘top-up’ payments to the most vulnerable households in bands A - D.

In East Devon we have circa 22K households in Bands E-H and of these 381 are in receipt of Council Tax Reduction (CTR). If we were to support those claiming CTR this would leave 1,037 households who we could help under our discretionary scheme based on an the same award of £150

### 5c. Going live

- Significant amount of work involved in order to implement this scheme.
- Working with our Strata colleagues in order to design both the form, pre fraud checks and to create the system for making payment direct to bank accounts for those on DD.
- Working with our Communications team in relation to website, letters, social media updates, etc. Already done a promotion to encourage residents to sign up to DD.
- Will be writing to all our DD accounts in early April with payments being made into bank accounts mid to late April
- Claim form being developed for main scheme and this will go live hopefully by end of April.
- Discretionary claim form will also need to be developed.
- Will need to develop a discretionary policy that will need to be approved by Cabinet

## 6. Summary & Key considerations

- Global energy crisis – higher energy bills disproportionately impact those on lower incomes as they spend a higher proportion of their income on utility bills. With rises in National Insurance and other household bills we are extremely worried about the impact this will have on our residents who are already financially struggling on how they are going to afford to cover day to day essentials.
- Particularly concerned on the impact of the rising fuel costs for residents in our rural areas where they don't have access to gas and are reliant on oil. They are not protected by the energy CAP and data from ONS 1,000 litres shows just how expensive this is.:
  - 2020 cost £379
  - 2021 cost £514
  - As at beginning of March 2022 £1,500

There is a real risk that many of our low income households will struggle to afford to buy the minimum 500L as this is now circa £750

- Although the £150 rebate plus the £200 in Autumn will help it is clearly not going to be enough.
- Household Support Fund ends 31 March and then we will be drawing on the Council's own hardship fund where we have available £279K (one off fund). Majority of HSF was used on Food (£91,150) & Energy (£42,604). This pressure is likely to get worse with rising costs across all household bills.
- Important to remember that although briefing is focussed on energy this is a symptom and therefore people are also likely to be struggling with other household bills including buying food.
- Collaborative working is critical in being able to achieve better outcomes for our residents and not just addressing immediate crisis. Some really positive cross working is happening.
- Looking to explore with Devon County Council ECOE/ Lendology potential opportunities for providing a scheme for funding oil/ off mains gas top ups and how we can move residents to renewables for those financially struggling.
- As already highlighted we are also planning to:
  - continue to develop the financial support hub to make it easier and relevant for our residents to know what support is available with household bills.
  - planning more proactive communications –via social media, residents newsletter, the app, etc.
  - including in our poverty dashboard data on households with oil, energy ratings, rented, low income households, etc. This will help to identify future interventions, targeted support, identifying properties below the EPC E rating etc in order to bring about energy efficiency improvements.
- Citizens Advice would like to see the government expand its warm home discount and make it more generous for people on low incomes.
- Members of this Panel may wish to recommend to Council to lobby government for more support with Energy costs including for a price cap on heating oil so that they are provided the same level of protections that consumers have with electric and gas. £350 already announced is not going to be enough especially if prices rise again this winter.
- Members may also want to consider whether they would recommend to Council to lobby government on further emergency funding to continue to help people to eat now that the HSF is finishing. Although this Council has made funding available ideally we need funding from government as well.

## 7. Anything else/ Questions?

- Welcome Members views and any questions and suggestions