

Report to: Housing Review Board



Date of Meeting 11th October 2022

Document classification: Part A Public Document

Exemption applied: None

Review date for release N/A

Emergency Winter Housing Plan

Report summary:

This report outlines our plans to respond to the cost of living crisis and our commitment to support our vulnerable tenants throughout the winter period. Given the dramatic increases in gas and electricity prices, and the sharp rising costs of many essential items for many the cost of basic survival needs will exceed household income.

The report proposes the adoption of a series of short-term measures to be implemented this winter and the creation of a Housing Winter Pressures Hardship Fund to help combat the worst impacts on vulnerable households.

Is the proposed decision in accordance with:

Budget Yes No

Policy Framework Yes No

Recommendation:

- (1) That the Housing Review Board recommend to Cabinet and Council the approval of a budget of £50,000 to allocate towards delivering this project and to designate as a Housing Winter Pressures Hardship Fund.
- (2) To give delegated Authority to the Strategic Lead- Housing, Health and Environment and the Housing Service Lead to approve the detail and criteria of the hardship fund and the grounds on which funds will be allocated to households.
- (3) To approve the other actions highlighted in the report that will deliver housings contribution to the EDDC Winter Pressures Plan.

Reason for recommendation:

To respond quickly to the worsening affordability crisis being faced by housing tenants. We wish to support and attempt to mitigate the worst effects of the increasing cost of living crisis by ensuring that at risk households can access affordable food, housing, warmth and meet other basic needs.

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Portfolio(s) (check which apply):

- Climate Action and Emergency Response
 Coast, Country and Environment

- Council and Corporate Co-ordination
- Democracy, Transparency and Communications
- Economy and Assets
- Finance
- Strategic Planning
- Sustainable Homes and Communities
- Tourism, Sports, Leisure and Culture

Equalities impact Medium Impact

An equality Impact assessment will be completed on development and delivery of the project.

Climate change Low Impact

Risk: High Risk; Not responding to the cost of living crisis places our tenants at serious risk, including the risk of not being able to access food and warmth.

Links to background information

[\(Public Pack\)Agenda Document for Cabinet, 05/10/2022 18:00 \(eastdevon.gov.uk\)](#)

Priorities (check which apply)

- Better homes and communities for all
- A greener East Devon
- A resilient economy

1. Background

1.1 A report on the cost of living crisis and EDDC winter pressures plan will be presented to Cabinet on the 5th October 2022. This report considers the cost of living crisis in the context of our Poverty Strategy and alongside our commitments to support our vulnerable residents. The report will propose the adoption of a series of short-term measures to be implemented this winter and to be incorporated into a Winter Pressures Plan to help combat the worst impacts on vulnerable households. Cabinet are likely to adopt the Winter Pressures Plan set out in the report and the implementation of the actions designed to mitigate some of the factors impacting on vulnerable households and to avoid them going into poverty (this will be confirmed at the meeting) . The proposals outlined within this report set out our response to the objectives deliverable by the housing service within the Winter Pressures Plan:

- Exercise discretion when providing welfare support and advice to support those people who could potentially go into crisis.
- Utilise Council resources set aside for poverty relief towards hardship payments and advice on debt relief.
- Maximise partnership working and coordinate efforts with our partners in the statutory, voluntary and community sectors towards poverty prevention.
- Promote affordable warmth, insulation and energy saving schemes, to improve heat retention and better insulated homes.
- Liaise with others including Devon County Council and local NHS organisations to help maintain and support residents in good physical and mental health, including

engaging in community-led health & wellbeing initiatives, volunteering and socialising via local initiatives.

- Liaise with others to support access to food and nutrition, including healthy eating exercises/initiatives, organising a community garden to grow produce, setting up of a Community Larders or providing extra support to local food banks to meet unmet need.
- Prepare for a possible 'rent shock' or increased Council Tax arrears as households in the district may prioritise between heating and eating instead of paying their rent or council tax.
- Increase capacity to provide housing advice that focuses on tenancy sustainment and preventing homelessness.
- Utilise Housing Community Centres as community facilities that support residents and communities combat cost of living threats.
- Working with Team Devon, Town and Parish Councils and the voluntary sector to explore the warm places project and how that can be delivered in East Devon.
- Assist tenants in furnishing and providing white goods in their new homes and avoid furniture poverty.

2. Emergency Winter Housing Plan

The proposals outlined within this report set out more specifically a series of measures that will form housings contribution to the Winter Pressures Plan.

2.1 Project Officer

We are in the process of recruiting a fixed term (6 months) Project Officer to lead on, consult, co-ordinate and deliver the housing services response to the Winter Pressures plan. We intend to fund this via staffing cost savings within the Housing Revenue Account that have arisen due to vacant posts. This approach was approved via SMT+ who recognised the need to press ahead at pace with developing this project in order to ensure we are able to support people quickly as winter approaches.

2.2 Project development

Due to the immediate need to create this project, the details of how we will actually deliver this on the ground are still very much emerging but the actions below are areas that we are now working on. We intend to run this project through to March 2023.

The Project Officer will:

- Consider what additional measures can be put in place to support tenants through the coming months; consulting with residents, the voluntary sector as well as our Corporate Financial resilience and support team.
- Set up a hardship fund to deal with immediate support that residents may need, and design an appropriate policy, procedure and a process for it. This may target our properties that are the most poorly insulated as we recognise the higher risks to tenants that reside in these properties.
- Risk assessing and opening Community centres to provide warmth, social interaction, broadband access and hot drinks, this may extend into providing additional food provision.
- Promote the work of the project both internally and externally, ensuring timely and relevant press releases, information and leaflets are produced; the information on the website is relevant and social media is used to best effect
- Work with other teams to deliver support services at the Community Centres including benefit maximisation, financial advice and resilience, foodbank, energy efficiency

- Co-ordinating external and internal support to ensure it reaches those people who need it.
- Design and deliver a toolbox talk for contractors entering our properties to help them identify signs and concerns that tenants may not be coping and how they should liaise with us when they come across these properties.
- Consider an extension of the current food poverty work we already undertake.
- Monitor outcomes of the project, this will be reported on a monthly basis to the Housing Leadership Team.

2.3 Consultation with involved and not involved tenants

We have consulted with tenants both involved and not involved by holding a workshop to discuss this topic, this happened on the 27th September 2022. The outcome of the consultation was that tenants would like the project to consider:

- The provision of scarves, socks, gloves and blankets
- We ensure areas where we only have a small number of properties are not excluded
- The provision of draft excluders
- Ensure we consider the needs of tenants who cannot easily walk to community centres
- The provision of energy efficient light bulbs
- Communication of where the foodbanks / community larders and how they can be accessed.
- Consider including the provision of pet food
- Provide utility support advice to tenants with electrical equipment that supports their health
- Hardship telephone number to be able to immediately access support
- The consider funding groups already in place so that they can provide hot drinks / warm places and snacks (libraries, pubs other groups, Parish halls)
- The recruitment of good neighbours with boundaries who could support and help
- Information packs for tenants
- Volunteers helping at community centres with opening / closing
- Enhanced cleaning / provision of toilet rolls in centres
- Provide reasons / activities for people to come to the centres
- Special winter newsletter with details of support that can be accessed.
- Educate tenants to keep warm
- Consider support for younger members of the household
- Provide support to tenants who cannot manage money

The Project Officer will consider the above to look how these measures can be incorporated into the project. The session was extremely beneficial and has helped us to develop current proposals as well as given us new ideas that could be quick to implement.

2.4 Further considerations.

The day to day work of the housing service touches on much of the work outlined in this report and there are further areas that we are developing that will have an added benefit to tenants and will contribute to what we are trying to achieve with this project;

- Review of the void standard to consider whether we let properties to a higher standard- example- carpets in every property?
- Identify properties with low energy efficiency ratings / in receipt of Household Support Fund and within the poverty index and explore how we can support them (repairs / financial)
- Review of the Furniture Recycling project

- Tenant profiling which will help us understand the different needs of our tenants. In relation to the equality standards, tenants with additional support needs and how tenants wish to communicate with us.

2.5 Resources

The Project Officer will be managed by the Interim Communities Manager and the wider team will also support the project. The Project Officer will work with other managers / officer in order to deliver the agreed projects. They will also seek to identify and enable volunteers to help deliver the projects

It is proposed that the Housing Review Board agree an initial fund of £50K to support the project, this will also include the creation of a Housing Winter Pressures Hardship fund that can be used to directly allocate financial support to tenants.

2.6 Delivery / monitoring / reporting

The Project Officer will report progress to the Housing Leadership Team monthly. A full report on the project will be presented to the Housing Review Board in May 2023.

Financial implications:

There is a recommendation for a supplementary budget of £50k, if approved this will be met from the HRA Balance.

Legal implications:

There are no legal implications on which to comment. (GSalter 29/09/2022)