**BRIEFING PAPER – COST OF LIVING CHALLENGE 2022/23**

**Purpose**

1. To provide a briefing about the steps taken to combat the cost of living challenges in Lincolnshire during 2022-2023.

**Governance**

1. Better Lives Lincolnshire Together [BLLT] commissioned District Councils with VCSE support through Lincolnshire Voluntary Engagement Team [LVET] to establish a Task & Finish Group to co-ordinate plans and action and to monitor and track progress to ensure effective delivery. West Lindsey District Council, City of Lincoln Council and North Kesteven District Council are leading this on behalf of County Authorities – the meetings take place fortnightly.
2. The T&F Group has established 4 sub-groups to co-ordinate action/delivery on Warm Spaces, Economic Resource, Food Support and Communications. The sub-groups meet between the T&F meetings and provide update reports on progress, share learning, and respond to feedback on emerging pressures and national guidance.

**Summary of Sub Group Progress**

1. **Warm Welcome Spaces** – these are being developed across the County by VCSE and Faith Groups and details are available on the national Warm Spaces Website – with links to this from Connect to Support Lincolnshire [CtSL] – but it should be noted that this is not comprehensive and a mapping exercise is proposed to gain a comprehensive picture A Safeguarding protocol has been developed for Warm Spaces Groups including advice about actions in respect of Domestic Abuse – this can be shared with groups proposing to set up Warm Spaces.
2. Warm Spaces can provide a warm and safe place, social activities & social networks, refreshments including a meal, healthy living, I/A services including access to other service, debt advice and income maximisation – in the longer-term the offer could be extended to the further development of Community Wellbeing Hubs strategically located across the Districts/County building on those already in place.
3. Further planning work is underway on pooling resources, procurement of warm packs and other resources, engaging with local businesses, and further developing the Warm Welcome Space offer ahead of next winter.
4. **Economic Resources** – Household Support Fund [HSF] 3 Phase 1 is being implemented and a proportion has been allocated for children and young people with holiday and activity support through schools and the balance to be allocated to District Councils to support families and single households with a focus on gradually removing food bank dependency by accessing Community Grocers.
5. HSF 3 Phase 2 is at planning stage with a potential focus on food supply through Food Banks and alternative provision through the newly developed Community Grocery approach. The Government have confirmed that there will be a HSF 4 for 2023/24 and some of the learning from previous HSF funding rounds will be used to inform delivery planning.
6. Funding sources either available or being sourced include: National Grid Community Support Fund; CAF £3M funding for small groups; NHS Winter Pressures Funds; Social Justice Fund; THRIVE Appeal through Lincolnshire Foundation; UK Prosperity and Rural England Prosperity Funds; Energy Bill Support Scheme – Alternative Funding; extension of the Fuel Voucher Scheme available through Citizens Advice; Collective Oil Buying and Bulk Buying Warm Packs Schemes.
7. Mapping of available funding sources has been undertaken by Lincolnshire Community Foundation [LCF] providing the VCSE sector with local and national funding sources, including Winter Pressures Funding. The Autumn Statement 2022 included Household Support Fund Round 4, National Cost of Living Support Payments, and increases in National Minimum Wage from April 2023.
8. Lincolnshire Voluntary Engagement Team [LVET} has produced a support package for the VCSE Sector with a focus on staff and volunteers to help them to combat the increases in costs and also a funding matrix developed by Lincolnshire Community Foundation providing access to a wide range of funding sources for organisations and community groups.
9. **Food Support** – food banks are providing more than emergency food supplies, they can also provide a safe place to make referrals to other services; an APP development being explored to put people in touch with a virtual triage system; social media campaign – rather than donate food people being encouraged to donate through Direct Debit to food banks; Household Support Fund 3 also provides resources for Districts to support building and developing community assets such as Food Banks, Community Groceries and Warm Welcome Spaces.
10. Food Banks can also provide support with coaching for new and developing groups setting up as food banks with support from larger more mature organisations plus signposting for grant funding. All food support is encouraged to register on the Greater Lincolnshire foodbank at: https://lincolnshirefoodpartnership.org/ as well as on the CTSL website linked with the District Council websites.

**Communications**

1. The communications sub-group works in conjunction with the LRF Warn and Inform group and reports on local and national cost of living initiatives around the county; ensuring consistent messaging across the county with links in from NHS Communications Teams.
2. The group meets on a regular basis to share good practice and ensure they are all delivering the same or similar messages in a way that the public can understand.
3. Further reminder is required about the information repository on CTSL website and encouraging the completion of the form for local groups inclusion with Warm Spaces featuring on the national Warm Spaces website. As well as virtual information via organisations websites consideration is being given to alternative communications mediums for those people not able to access virtually.

**Action Plans**

1. Within the context of the strategic action planwhich has4 Objectives Communications, Co-ordinating Activities, Acting Decisively, and Influencing Local and National Decision Makers, sits sub-groups Action Plans and the Lincolnshire Financial Inclusion Partnership [LFIP] Action Plan with oversight from the T&F Group to ensure harmonisation and avoid duplication.

**Capacity**

1. System capacity as a result of the demands arising from the Cost of Living Challenge for organisations to be kept under review bearing in mind that this could be an ongoing focus work area for 2023-24 bearing in mind financial forecasts.

**Status Update and Closure Report**

1. A status update report is currently under preparation and will be available towards the end of February 2023. This will form the basis of a future progress report.
2. A closure report will follow and this will be used to measure success of the Cost of Living initiatives in Lincolnshire and to support planning for winter 2023/24.

**Next Steps/Way Forward**

1. The next briefing paper will be based on the status report currently under development.
2. In the meantime work continues through the Cost of Living Challenge Stakeholder Group and the sub-groups with a focus on economic resources, food support, warm welcome spaces, and communications, all aimed at supporting citizens through these economically challenging times for households, & public, private and voluntary sector organisations.

**Barry Earnshaw, on behalf of LVET**

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