



Subject:	Supporting Vulnerable People impacted by Cost-of-Living
Date:	6 December 2022
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Restricted Reports	
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?	
After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Some time in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>

Call-in	
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

1.0	Purpose of Report or Summary of Main Issues
1.1	To provide P&C Committee with an update on plans to support vulnerable people and families impacted by the cost-of living crisis and who are at risk of negative health and social impacts of living in cold homes.
2.0	Recommendations
2.1	The Committee is asked to note the contents of this report and <ul style="list-style-type: none">i. note the Council's expanding role in supporting vulnerable people/households impacted by the cost-of-living crisisii. note the work underway to bring forward a programme of warm hubs (Warm Welcome / Warm Spaces) in Council assets and facilities during this winter periodiii. consider the civic leadership and convening role of the Council in bringing together a citywide programme of similar support and in helping raise awareness and signposting to such facilities

	iv. note the support provided by the MarCom's team in helping to raise awareness and promote the support available including the development and rollout of the #BelfastTogether narrative.
3.0	Main report
	<u>Background</u>
3.1	Households and vulnerable individuals are experiencing the perfect storm, emerging from a Covid-19 pandemic, growing pressures on household incomes and unprecedented increases in gas and electricity bills. The impacts of fuel poverty are felt in a wide range of ways, on physical and mental health, household finances, the economy and ultimately on people's quality of life. Despite the hard work of many agencies across the statutory, community, voluntary and private sectors, the impact of fuel poverty is intensifying within Belfast and the wider region.
3.2	It is important to highlight the growing pressures and demand on referrals to existing support schemes including the Affordable Warmth Scheme and the Belfast Warm and Well programme both of which are already exceeding capacity and we are still to enter the winter period. The Warm and Well programme has experienced a 300% growth in demand since it was first established.
3.3	Members will be aware of the recent decision taken by the SP&R Committee to allocate £1m towards a fuel hardship scheme across the city. Council officers are also engaging with the Department for Communities to explore what support can be brought forward for those most need during this winter period.
	<u>Key Issues</u>
3.4	Members may be aware of the growing focus across the UK whereby public, voluntary and faith organisations are utilising local community assets and facilities as 'warm hubs' which are open for people to go to keep warm and often to refreshments and to take part in social activities. This initiative is being brought forward at pace in response to the inability of people and families to heat their home this winter.
3.5	Whilst recognising that 'warm hubs' should not be seen as an alternative to providing households with adequate resources to make heating their homes affordable, there is a growing number of councils across Northern Ireland who are already bringing forward similar plans for either setting up, supporting or highlighting/signposting the locations for 'warm hubs'. Whilst not a new concept, as we enter the forthcoming winter months, this is a practical step to support people in communities who need it the most.

3.6	<p>Within Belfast, the concept of warm hubs (or Warm Welcome/Spaces) is building momentum with a number of key services including, from a Council perspective, our leisure and community centres, putting in place plans to have locations within their facilities as warm hubs which will be made available for people to avail of during the colder months.</p>
3.7	<p>Work is also underway to programme a series of activities and events within these facilities (e.g. tea clubs, homework clubs, classes, wellness programmes etc) to encourage attendance and broaden the scope (to reduce stigma and encourage longer-term engagement). Discussions are also ongoing with other key statutory agencies and community service providers including NI Libraries, Museums, the Public Health Authority and Area Partnership Boards in relation to their plans/proposals. Officers have also utilised established community planning networks to gather information on relevant local initiatives which may be planned</p>
3.8	<p>Whilst the Council has a direct role in providing such facilities, it can also use its leadership and convening role to help coordinate a citywide programme and help identify, raise awareness and signpost to locations which may be available across the city through multiple platforms and channels. Members to note that officers are currently pulling together a short and easy-to-read information booklet which will outline the range of key support services available as well as advice, including energy savings tips, to help people mitigate the impacts of the cost-of-living crisis. Again, the intention would be that this information would be shared as widely as possible and using multiple channels.</p>
<p><u>Marketing and Communications</u></p>	
3.9	<p>Our Marketing and Communications team is providing comms support around a number of initiatives that Council is rolling out in response to the cost-of-living crisis. Some of the initiatives have been referred to above and seek to support communities/households in need - for example our 'warm spaces, warm welcomes' programme in leisure/community centres; extra programming in community centres to encourage people, particularly seniors, into our community centres; community advice sessions including energy saving advice; fuel stamps; age-friendly events, and the Fuel Hardship Scheme. It is also important to note that ongoing communications activity and messaging around the circular economy, employment academies and support for businesses – all relate back to Council supporting the city/communities during this time of crisis.</p>
3.10	<p>Similar to our communications approach during Covid, our Marcomms team is providing signposting for our residents and ratepayers to relevant third-party services and resources available to help with the cost-of-living crisis, including the 'warm spaces, warm welcomes' scheme being delivered by our leisure partners, GLL. In the latest edition of City Matters, we included a dedicated section on where to go for support and advice in relation to the cost-of-living crisis. We have also developed a #BelfastTogether narrative so that relevant information can be</p>

	<p>'badged' in a consistent, recognisable way. This is currently running across Council's social media channels, and we will continue to regularly review and update our web content.</p>
3.11	<p>Earlier this month, we launched our own programme of 'warm spaces, warm welcomes' in community centres, involving the Lord Mayor in Marcomms activity including the Lord Mayor's video blog, and our Marcomms activity has also been highlighting the positive work going on to support older people in our communities including information sessions and age-friendly events. We are planning more PR and Marcomms activity to promote this work and encourage citizen engagement in the coming weeks. Attached at Appendix 1 is some illustrative artwork developed for the upcoming drop-in sessions.</p>
3.12	<p>Members to note that a core group of internal officers from across council, including e.g. CNS, Climate and Community Planning will be brought together to ensure that the internal consideration and operational planning of future support is coordinated and synergies maximised. MarCom's will continue to provide advice, support and leadership on the associated comms and how this can fit with the #BelfastTogether narrative.</p>
	<p><u>Financial & Resource Implications</u></p>
3.13	<p>The financial implications contained within this report will be funded through existing departmental budgets and/or through possible financial or in-kind contributions from partners towards programming activity.</p>
	<p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Implications</u></p>
3.14	<p>None</p>
4.0	<p><u>Appendices – Documents Attached</u></p>
	<p>Appendix 1: Illustrative Artwork</p>