

Committee: Community and Children's Services	Dated: 23/01/2023
Subject: Responding to cost of living pressures – food pantry funding and action update	Public
Which outcomes in the City Corporation's Corporate Plan does this proposal aim to impact directly?	2, 3, 4
Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending?	N
If so, how much?	N/A
What is the source of Funding?	N/A
Has this Funding Source been agreed with the Chamberlain's Department?	N/A
Report of: Clare Chamberlain, Interim Executive Director of Community and Children's Services	For Information
Report author: Zoe Dhami, Strategy and Project Officer, Community and Children's Services	

Summary

This report provides an update on the City of London Corporation response to cost-of-living pressures.

Recommendation

Members are asked to:

- Note the report and action update.

Main Report

Background

1. In September 2022 Members were provided with an update report on how the City of London Corporation is responding to the cost-of-living pressures faced by residents.
2. The report set out actions under a number of priorities: communications to promote support provision; targeting financial assistance; winter warmth; tackling food poverty; increasing income from employment; and wellbeing.
3. These actions seek to mitigate the pressures some households face – supplementing government support and utilising government funding provided to help struggling households.

4. The delivery and co-ordination of action is led by a Cost-of-Living Steering Group consisting of departmental and partner organisation representatives.
5. An update on those actions is highlighted below and appended in detail.
6. Members were also asked to approve an amendment to the Stronger Communities Grant criteria to allow for the 'warm space' criteria to fund activities and warm spaces over the winter period.

Update

Winter warmth

7. The temporary amendment has been made to Stronger Communities Grant criteria, to make available 'warm spaces small grants' to fund activity and access where people can come together and stay warm. This has been promoted through partners, regular channels, faith organisations and resident organisations.
8. Three warm space grants have been awarded as of December 2022. Two are for initiatives in the City, and one for City tenants living in Southwark. Applications have been fast-tracked by the Central Grants Unit (CGU), with decisions made on applications within two to three weeks. Four other applications were received but did not meet the eligibility criteria as they were not targeting City of London residents or those living on its managed housing estates.
9. The Stronger Communities Grant programme continues to assess on a rolling basis applications that are responding to arising community needs. The CGU and officers in the department work in close collaboration to ensure that decisions on grants are made quickly and are in line with the Committee's priorities.
10. The City of London Corporation has commissioned Groundwork London to provide an energy advisor (or Green Doctor) service to help people stay warmer and use less energy. The service is available for free to vulnerable and low-income residents. The service is being funded by the City and Hackney Health and Care Board.

Targeting financial assistance

11. The third round of government-funded Housing Support Fund (£63,000) has been released. The funding beneficiaries are City residents receiving housing benefit only. Once this funding has been allocated to the beneficiary group, any remaining funds can be allocated at the discretion of the City of London Corporation.

12. The Holiday Activities and Food programme (HAF) – which delivers free holiday time activity and meals to recipients of free school meals – provided a programme over the Christmas period at Portsoken and Golden Lane Community Centres.
13. City Connections has given its carers a £50 voucher to provide some additional help over the winter months.

Tackling food poverty

14. The department has been working with colleagues in Tower Hamlets to explore the potential of extending access to their food support offer for those living east of the Square Mile (Golden Lane falls within the beneficiary area for the support offered by St Luke's Community Centre). Initial consideration was given to opening their existing Whitechapel food pantry to more people, however, this is now at capacity so not a viable option. However, discussions with Tower Hamlets and their provider Family Action have been positive, and Family Action is developing a proposal to deliver a food pantry in the City of London.
15. The proposed food pantry will be membership based, with members paying £3.50 weekly for food and essentials valued at £20–30. Beneficiaries are referred by advice and support agencies and given an initial three-month membership. The proposal is for Family Action to run the food pantry service for 12 months from the community space of Artizan Street Library one day per week. Fresh and frozen food would be offered, as well as non-perishable and household items.
16. The food pantry offer would be open to those living in the east, including those in Aldgate outside of the City of London border.
17. After discussions with the CGU, it is proposed that an application will be considered by the City of London Corporation's Combined Relief of Poverty Charity (CRPC) (1073660). The CGU are engaging with Family Action, with input from officers from the Department of Community and Children's Services to ensure that any application will further the objects of the CRPC. Any application received will be assessed by the CGU Team with recommendations provided to Members for decision.
18. The City of London Corporation is the sole Trustee of the CRPC, with decision-making delegated to the Community and Children's Services Committee, acting as Trustee for the Charity. The report in relation to this application will ask Members of the Committee to consider its decision acting as Trustee, and in the best interests of the CRPC.

Corporate & Strategic Implications

Strategic implications

19. The poverty reduction action plan aligns to the commitments of the Corporate Plan, Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy and Children and Young People's Plan.

Corporate implications

20. This piece of work aligns with and supports the following outcomes of the Corporate Plan:

Contribute to a flourishing society

2. People enjoy good health and wellbeing
3. People have equal opportunities to enrich their lives and reach their full potential
4. Communities are cohesive and have the facilities they need.

Financial implications

21. Current activity is being funded through resources made available from government and in principle funding from the City and Hackney Health and Care Board. Further initiatives may require additional funding to be identified but, given the pressures on departmental and corporate finances, this cannot be guaranteed.

Resource implications

22. Officers from the Chamberlain's Department and Department of Community and Children's Services have absorbed this work within existing capacity. It may be that further growth in activity would require dedicated resource.

Legal implications

23. None

Risk implications

24. None

Equalities implications

25. Targeted action on reducing poverty in the City of London will work towards reducing inequalities in health and wellbeing, and income across the square mile. Poverty disproportionately impacts those with protected characteristics.

Climate implications

26. None

Security implications

27. None

Conclusion

28. The City of London Corporation has taken action to support the residents impacted by the cost-of-living crisis. A multi-agency steering group has been set up to oversee the implementation of an action plan to progress further initiatives to maximise the impact that can be delivered through the services offered and funding available.

Appendices

- Appendix 1 – Update on cost-of-living actions

Background Papers

- 22/09/2022 – Responding to poverty and cost of living pressures

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