

Executive Statement July 2022: The Cost of Living

The overall goal of Levelling Up in Essex is to ensure that everyone can achieve their potential and have a good quality standard of living. This is an important pillar of Everyone's Essex.

We launched our White Paper six months ago and we have been visiting each of the six priority areas, announcing a first wave of interventions to support and encourage

- good jobs
- a high-quality environment
- educational attainment and skills
- healthy and active lifestyles
- strong and resilient families and communities

As Cllr Louise McKinlay has said throughout this process, these interventions are about long-term meaningful change for our most deprived areas. Many more interventions will follow, but so far we have been able to support through:

- **Financial Wellbeing** – a series of test and learn projects to enable people to improve their financial wellbeing through positive decisions
- **Holiday Activity Clubs** – free holiday clubs during the summer holiday, at least 4 hours per day of fun, nutritional education, at least one meal and mentoring and support for the whole family. This summer 200 clubs will take place across Essex
- **Community Challenge Fund** – provides small grants for groups to develop a vision for their local community and take forward projects that will help them to achieve it
- **Social Supermarkets** – help families on low incomes buy food and household essentials at lower prices, beginning in Tendring and Basildon
- **Pedal Power** – expansion across Essex to provide bikes to those on low incomes
- **Digital Inclusion Programme** – to identify and address the drivers of digital exclusion

However, the long-term issues we are trying to address through levelling up have been exacerbated in the short term by the cost of living crisis, inflation and rising prices of essentials. More than 76,000 Essex households (12.1% of Essex total) are in fuel poverty, and this is only likely to increase. Wages rose by 3.8% between November 2021 and January 2022, but inflation means that in real terms pay fell by 1% compared to 12 months ago and will continue to fall. We know that the most harshly affected residents in Essex are working families; single parent households; women 65+ and young adults 19-25. This will be compounded further for those who are unpaid carers or who have children with disabilities. We have already seen applications to the Essential Living Fund increase significantly.

Much has already been done to help. We are taking action through initiatives such as the Council Tax Rebate Scheme, the Household Support Fund, and the Essential Living Fund. These programmes have supported thousands of vulnerable and struggling residents with cash payments for food, fuel, and essential living costs – this is on top of the support already provided by our front line services in areas like

children and adult social care. We have also been working on ways to help people to reduce their energy bills and be more environmental at the same time, through Warm Homes Essex, a way you can get advice and access funding for improvements to reduce your energy usage – the savings on offer will be even greater now with rising energy costs.

The Government have also recently announced increased support from the treasury of at least £1,200 this year, including a new one-off £650 cost of living payment, benefiting more than 117,000 households across Greater Essex. The universal support offer has also increased from £200 to £400, with the requirement to repay the discount over 5 years being scrapped.

This is still a very moving picture, with the situation likely to worsen for many residents as we move into autumn and winter. The Government are very alive to this and are looking at ways to further support people through this crisis. I expect we will see more announcements in the coming months and through the Autumn Statement.

I am also sure that there is more we can do in Essex. While we monitor how this situation develops over the summer, and assess the ways the interventions from Government and others will help. I intend to propose a summit with our partners across the public sector, beyond just local government, to make sure we join up and do not duplicate our efforts to make sure our work has the greatest impact in supporting people through this crisis.

I'd like to ask our Members for their help as well. I would like to understand how this crisis is affecting your residents in your divisions. You can help highlight the pressures in even greater detail than we already have and begin to demonstrate the gaps we could fill. In return we will try to equip you with the tools to help. We can help you to signpost our residents to support when it is available, and where it is not we will take that back and look at what more we can do. Please do write to me if you'd be interested in this.