

Bracknell Forest Council: 100 Days Cost of Living Support

In June 2023, the Executive agreed a series of actions to extend and enhance the local support for residents experiencing financial hardship. Specifically, the ambition was to deliver this within the first 100 days following the election. Significant progress has been made in the 14 weeks until now. As the 100 days ends (13 August), progress against each commitment is summarised.

Accelerated Proposals	Progress <i>Green – Completed, Yellow -In progress, Red – Not started.</i>	Notes and next steps
Host a cost-of-living support and information session in Princess Square. Partner organisations will be invited to join to share with residents more about their local work and how they can provide help.	Event held on 4th August with 15 partners exhibiting. Groups included Bracknell foodbank, Share, Cowshed, CAEB, The Ark, First Days, Silva Homes, DWP, BFC Welfare, Everyone Active, OLC, Libraries, SE Water, Social Prescribing, St Vincent De Paul Society.	Much positive feedback was received including a local Bracknell News article and That's TV Thames Valley interview. Next steps are to explore future opportunities for similar events/outreach (to be discussed as part of action plan review).
Run a targeted campaign using local low-income-family's data to drive take up of Council Tax Support for those in arrears.	Households identified through LIFT and have been contacted, this has resulted in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 23 households awarded a council tax reduction, meaning £31,972 more annually across these households. • A further three households received council tax exemptions, £10,477 annually. • A further £7,110 was awarded to 24 qualifying households through the Local Welfare Scheme. • DHP awards were granted to two households, generating £1,876 for them. This means, overall, £51,435 additional income for this financial year has been generated to households.	Currently establishing next campaign area, likely to be related to universal credit eligibility.
Deliver cost of living drop-in sessions with council teams such as Welfare attending each family hub.	One trial session has been delivered Great Hollands. Scoping of available venues and networks is continuing.	Will need to agree the use of resource across larger events such as the Princess Square event, and smaller more regular support sessions. To be explored as part of action plan review.

Meet with headteachers to highlight local cost of living support and provide signposting material for parents.	Met with headteachers on 19 June to explore financial challenges their pupils are experiencing. Many schools were working with families directly and managing this. All headteachers were provided with a signposting document for relevant local and national support. Some potential further areas to explore related to food costs and school uniform.	Research conducted into year 6 -7 transition costs including recommendations to be discussed by members. The community grants programme has also been adapted to more clearly suggest it can be used for costs such as breakfast club food.
Explore if any further work is needed to work with residents who have received a Council tax energy rebate as credit but are not liable to pay council tax, so that they can receive this directly.	299 households have been individually reviewed and contacted. A further 30 households have provided bank details to make payment, distributing an extra £4,500 of income across these households.	Work continues with the others who have not responded, including more personalised letters and wider contacts. Some household circumstances may have changes so it's unlikely to reach a 100% distribution rate.
Promote the availability of social tariffs for broadband bills, to reduce digital exclusion due to unaffordability.	Hard copy promotional materials have been provided to the hub in Times Square and to the libraries as well. The Social Tariff checker has been added to cost of living website. An article was included in Summer Town and Country and included in summer e-letter to residents.	No further action.
Existing commitments		
Further promote and provide support to residents applying for the Household Support Fund and Local Welfare Scheme. This can provide short term support for essential costs related to food and energy.	Between 1 May and 10 August - £34,263 has been distributed to 122 households for essential and crisis support related to food, energy and household essential costs. This is in addition to 19 foodbank vouchers issued.	This extended support will continue through the household support until March 2024. Pending any further funding, the Local Welfare Scheme will continue to operate beyond March 2024, but for more targeted/crisis requests.
Award up to £150,000 to local organisations as part of the Household Support Fund partnership grant, via a grant application process. To continue to deliver support to residents this winter.	£105,000 has been awarded to VCFS groups through the initial round of funding. This has been distributed to seven local organisations for projects including extending the Bracknell Foodbank support, clothing and bedding support, and a new community pantry location.	The remaining £45,000 will be awarded in a 'small grants' scheme, particularly targeting smaller community groups and activity, with grants up to £5,000 available. This scheme will launch on 21 August 2023.