

This Report will be made public on 31 October 2022

Report Number **OS/22/07**

To: Overview and Scrutiny
Date: 8 November 2022
Status: Non-Key Decision
Head of Service: Charlotte Spendley, Director – Corporate Services
Cabinet Member: Councillor Hollingsbee, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Communities
SUBJECT: Cost of Living Summit

SUMMARY:

On 6 September this Committee agreed the arrangements for holding a cost of living summit. In agreeing the proposed arrangements, the Committee also asked for a report summarising the presentations, discussions and actions arising from the summit to be considered at a future meeting of the Committee. This report provides feedback on the summit held on 20 September 2022 and updates on the actions that have been taken or are underway following the summit.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Overview and Scrutiny is asked to:

- 1. To receive and note report OS/22/07**
- 2. To endorse the cost of living leaflet and the ongoing activity following the summit.**

1. BACKGROUND

1.1 To ensure the summit was developed in line with Member's expectations, informal discussions were held with Councillor Keutenius (as Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee) and Councillor Hollingsbee (as Cabinet Member for Cabinet Member for Communities, Lifeline, Area Officers & Street Homeless). These discussions helped officers produce the outline for the summit set out below.

- a) Objective – to ensure that the council is working effectively in partnership with local organisations and the voluntary sector to support residents in need with food, warmth and energy during the coming winter months.
- b) Format – the format of a formal council meeting may inhibit debate and be uncomfortable for some attendees. Therefore, it was proposed to have an informal meeting from which a report could be produced back to a subsequent meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- c) Agenda – to provide structure and clarity over the areas of debate an agenda was produced but there were no formal reports.
- d) Speakers – following a welcome and introduction by Councillor Keutenius, it was proposed to have four speakers and invitations were issued accordingly. A senior officer from the Revenues and Benefits Service, and representatives from the Rainbow Centre, the Community Hubs and the Citizens Advice Bureau in turn gave presentations to the meeting. Each speaker was asked to set out how their organisation is responding to the cost of living crisis and the support they are offering to residents. There was time for questions after each speaker and, after the final speaker, all the speakers participated in a panel session with questions from the audience. When the panel session concluded, colleagues were encouraged to stay and network with their peers.
- e) Outputs – it was proposed to send a pro-forma to all attendees asking them to provide full contact details and information about the services they provide and the locations they serve. This was intended to assist in the compilation of a comprehensive register that could be used by residents to access help and by organisations to make cross-referrals.

1.2 Given the short period of time available, and the difficulty in aligning the diaries of many busy partners, it was considered expedient to make use of a meeting with voluntary sector partners that was already scheduled for 20 September. This is a quarterly remote meeting that is organised by the Revenues and Benefits Service to discuss welfare issues with colleagues and partners.

1.3 Council (27 July, minute 22) asked for all voluntary organisations assisting residents to be invited and so leading councillors and colleagues were consulted to identify organisations and obtain contact details. More than 100 people were invited from 60 different organisations.

- 1.4 The summit was well attended and it has been available to view as a webcast, using the link below, for those that were unable to participate on the day –

[Cost of Living Summit - Tuesday, 20th September 2022 at 2:00pm - Folkestone & Hythe webcasting \(public-i.tv\)](#)

2. THE SUMMIT

- 2.1 The Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Councillor Keutenius, opened the meeting and thanked everyone for their attendance. She spoke of her aspiration that organisations could work together in partnership to support any residents in need of help.
- 2.2 Councillor Hollingsbee, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Communities, highlighted some of the important work going on in the District, and hoped the Summit would encourage more partnership working and identify any gaps in the provision that could be bridged.
- 2.3 Andrew Hatcher, Revenues and Benefits Lead Specialist - Folkestone and Hythe District Council (FHDC), provided a presentation that detailed the services and support offered by the Council.

Following the presentation, the following points were noted:

- The Council was looking for additional funding streams to enable it to provide more support for those struggling.
 - There was support available for people not on benefits.
 - Kent County Council's Refer Kent programme was looking for organisations to add to the system.
 - Partners should let FHDC's Welfare team know if they had clients in urgent need of support.
 - The Welfare team would ask customers for permission to share their details with partners, such as Disability Assist.
- 2.4 Wendy Lehnert, Food Services Manager - The Rainbow Centre, provided a presentation about the work of the Centre and advised of a new Hythe Pantry service that would soon be operational.

After the presentation, the following points were noted:

- Although more food donations had been received than in previous years, the demand for the service had also increased, so the need for donations remained high.
- Councillors could make food bank donations at the Council when they attend Council meetings.

2.5 Jon Wilson, Chief Executive - Romney Marsh Community Hub, gave a presentation looking back at how the hub had responded to the challenges of the Covid pandemic, then looking forward to how the hub would be supporting people during the cost of living crisis, this included the provision of warm spaces, where people could come during the day to escape the cold.

2.6 Sue Day, District Manager, Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB), provided a presentation that detailed the types of support the CAB had been offering. She believed that the cost of living rises had already led to an increase in the number of threats of suicide.

2.7 Following the presentations, the comments and actions below were noted during the general discussion:

- The Rotary Club asked organisations to get in touch with them so they could offer their support.
- The Council and Councillors needed to highlight to Government the severity of the challenges faced at a local level.
- Was there any support for parents paying child support who may find it harder to afford payments as other costs go up?
- Were there any other spaces that could be offered as warm spaces for people? Churches were co-ordinating their efforts to provide warm church spaces. A document detailing the location and opening times of warm spaces should be produced.
- There was a lot already happening, and this needed to be advertised to the public.
- Could Refer Kent provide a resource that would enable organisations to share their contact details and information at a ward level? This would enable organisations to see what support was locally available to people.
- Small and medium enterprises needed more support to help ensure they stayed in business.
- How did small organisations link into these networks to ensure a full picture of support was available?
- Could the Council give funds to some organisations to offer clothes washing and drying facilities? This would help to reduce fuel costs in homes.
- Meetings with key partners could be set up in the three areas of the district, to specifically focus on the needs of that area.
- The district newsletter should be used to advise of the support and services available within the district.
- Social Enterprise Kent had a phone line people could call; they could help to sign post people to support services.
- Social Enterprise Kent could assist with employability support.
- The Council's communications team were working on a digital and non-digital campaign to raise awareness about the cost of living and support.

3. ACTIONS FOLLOWING THE SUMMIT

- 3.1 Following the summit a comprehensive leaflet has been produced detailing help available and how to access that help. The Leaflet will be distributed via libraries, partner organisations and the customer access point, see Appendix 1 for a copy. Social Enterprise Kent (SEK) have also produced a booklet covering all of East Kent, which includes a section on support for residents of this district. This document will be widely available through their networks and SEK have asked the Council to share any updated information eg District Food Network (DFN) activity. This means more information will be available to the community beyond our own leaflet and SEK intend to update their booklet regularly. In addition to this, content from the leaflet is being included in the Council newspaper Your District Today. The newspaper is distributed to all residential properties in the district and the Communications Team are also exploring other ways of disseminating the information.
- 3.2 One of the initial objectives of the summit was to gather information that could be used to construct a register of organisations and their activities. However, it has become clear that developing such a register would be very time consuming and would be duplicating an existing very thorough resource provided by Kent County Council (KCC). Therefore, we will be making use of KCC's new initiative - Refer Kent that enables better cross-referrals and signposting and support for residents.
- 3.3 The Council will build on the summit through continued engagement with the community Hubs, the DFN and other community organisations across the district, including the faith sector. Already churches and community groups, including the Nepalese Community Centre, are developing plans for warm spaces. We will work with these organisations to provide additional support as there is potential to use the warm spaces for drop in and advice to give residents more information on support available to them, from foodbanks to welfare support, as well as support in filling in forms.
- 3.4 A small amount of funding (from an un-allocated Health & Wellbeing budget) is being used to support the local warm spaces with small items such as hot water bottles, blankets and flasks. This will link in the future to the UKSPF work but for the immediate situation a small contribution of between £100-£500 will be given to those organisations running warm spaces until the funding is depleted for this financial year. The church sector has a platform where warm spaces can register and further work is being carried out to support this initiative. Working together with SEK, the Council will seek to encourage a good spread of warm spaces across the district and that they are available on different days.
- 3.5 On 12th November a 'Keeping well in the Winter' event is taking place at FOLCA and this is being led by the NHS. The summit was helpful in enabling the support this event needs to be put in place. Whilst health teams will concentrate on vaccinations (flu/covid, screening, healthy weight etc), organisations are being contacted to get involved in a market place. Residents can then directly hear from community hubs, welfare teams and the DFN for example on eating well for less and food bank/ pantry advice.

3.6 OSC is asked to note the content of this report and the ongoing activity that has resulted following the cost of living summit.

4. RISK MANAGEMENT ISSUES

4.1 A summary of the perceived risks follows:

Perceived risk	Seriousness	Likelihood	Preventative action
Lack of engagement from the voluntary sector	4	1	Ongoing dialogue and support to nurture effective relationships.

5. LEGAL/FINANCIAL AND OTHER CONTROLS/POLICY MATTERS

5.1 Legal Officer's Comments (NM)

There are no legal implications arising directly from this report.

5.2 Finance Officer's Comments (RH)

The various contributions being arranged for warm spaces, leaflet printing and the publishing of Your District Today are funded by the existing budgets.

5.3 Diversities and Equalities Implications (GE)

There are no negative equality and diversity implications directly arising from this report. The comprehensive leaflet sets out the help available to residents and the ways in which they can access this help and information. The distribution of this leaflet will be channelled at key points within local communities across the district – Libraries, partner organisations as well as the Customer Access Point. Support measures being made available will also be reflected in the Council's own 'Your District Today' publication posted out to households. In addition, further online methods for distributing this information should be considered to complement the existing channels reflected in this report to ensure the widest possible accessibility and awareness of the help and support being made available.

5.4 Climate Change Implications (OF)

The climate implications arising from this report should be positive.

Social and economic benefits – the actions arising from the report will result in positive social and economic impacts. For example, warm homes will reduce energy use for many and detailing the help available and how to access the help can have positive impacts on the wellbeing of participants.

6. CONTACT OFFICERS AND BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Councillors with any questions arising out of this report should contact the following officers prior to the meeting

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The following background documents have been relied upon in the preparation of this report: None

Appendices:

Appendix 1: Help with Cost of Living Leaflet