

# Public Document Pack

## SOUTHEND-ON-SEA CITY COUNCIL

### Meeting of Economic Recovery, Regeneration & Housing Working Party

**Date: Monday, 5th September, 2022**

**Place: Remote Meeting via Microsoft Teams**

**Present:** Councillor I Gilbert (Chair)  
Councillors B Beggs\*, M Berry, T Cox, C Mulroney, D Nelson,  
M Sadza and M Terry

\*Substitute in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 31.

**In Attendance:** Councillors M Borton, D Cowan, M Dent, S George, B Hooper,  
K Mitchell and K Murphy  
G Halksworth, T Harris, A Keating, E Lindsell, B Nemeth, S Newman,  
T Nicola, C Oksuz, A Richards and S Tautz

**Start/End Time:** 6.30 pm - 8.00 pm

#### **1 Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor M Davidson (Substitute: Councillor B Beggs).

#### **2 Declarations of Interest**

No declarations of interest were made by members of the Working Party.

#### **3 Notice of Motion- Cost of Living Emergency**

The Working Party received a presentation of the Interim Executive Director (Strategy, Change and Governance) in response to a Notice of Motion referred by the Council at its meeting on 22 August 2022, concerning the proposed declaration of a cost-of-living emergency in Southend-on-Sea.

Councillors were advised that residents of Southend-on-Sea were currently facing a cost-of-living emergency. Members were reminded that the rate of inflation in the United Kingdom had reached 10.1% in July 2022, the highest it had been since 1982, and that it was possible that inflation could reach 12% later in the year. It was reported that in October 2022, the new energy price cap would see average annual bills exceed £3,500, which would leave many residents facing an unaffordable cost to keep their homes warm during the Winter, and that the cap was also expected to increase further in January 2023 to over £5,300. Councillors were advised that, at the same time, food and housing costs were also increasing dramatically and that levels of vulnerability were illustrated by a record number of children in local schools that were currently eligible for free school meals. It was reported that, although no specific data was currently available for Southend-on-Sea, a University of Hull study had indicated that 64.4% of households would fall into fuel poverty in the East of England, with such rate spiking for people over sixty-five years of age, lone parents with two or more children and families with more than two children. Members noted that levels of fuel poverty might be higher

in Southend than across the East of England, based demographics and on the increasing number of residents accessing support services provided by Citizens Advice and the Council.

The Working Party was reminded that some financial measures to support households had been announced by the Chancellor of the Exchequer in February, March and May 2022 and that it was anticipated that further announcements in response to the cost-of-living emergency would be made later in September 2022, following the recent election of the new Prime Minister, to outline additional national support in relation to the crisis.

Members were assured that the Council recognised the effects of the cost-of-living emergency and the impact that it was having on local residents and businesses and that there had already been a concerted effort from the authority and its partners to respond to the crisis. The Working Party noted current and planned activity to address the specific areas of focus set out within the Notice of Motion, including the ongoing work of the tackling poverty workstream and wider strategic activity, but was reminded that it would be necessary to ensure that the Council's response to the cost-of-living emergency was considered with reference to the overarching budget principles introduced in 2022, in order to support the financial sustainability of the authority and that the delivery of a response to the crisis might need to be balanced in terms of 'trade-off' from other areas of service provision. Members were advised that a detailed report on the Council's budget position for the first four months of the year and how the authority was being impacted by the current economic position, was to be made to the next meeting of the Cabinet.

Councillors supported the establishment of a partnership task and finish group to deliver the response to the cost-of-living emergency, but considered that the Economic Recovery, Regeneration and Housing Working Party should fulfil this multi-agency role, with representation also including Group Leaders, Cabinet Members, representatives of the existing Economic Crisis Recovery Group and relevant stakeholders, to share intelligence and resources to maximise the impact of work in response to the cost-of-living emergency. The Working Party stressed that such multi-agency group should undertake initial scoping for the development of a co-produced action plan based on a 'thematic' response to the cost-of-living emergency as soon as possible, whilst also identifying 'quick wins' for priority implementation. Councillors suggested a number of such 'quick wins' that might be able to be introduced at pace and emphasised the vital role of communications activity in the delivery of the response to the cost-of-living emergency. Members also suggested several communication opportunities that could be investigated in this regard.

Resolved:

- (1) That the Notice of Motion seeking the declaration of a cost-of-living emergency in Southend-on-Sea be noted and that the recommendations set out within the Notice of Motion be supported by the Working Party.
- (2) That the following recommendations be made to the Cabinet:
  - (a) That a cost-of-living emergency be declared in Southend-on-Sea.

- (b) That the recommendations set out within the Notice of Motion be reviewed in line with the Council's budget principles already agreed, the most significant being the financial implications of response to the cost-of-living emergency.
- (c) That the proposed approach to the response to the cost-of-living emergency, alongside the tackling poverty workstream and wider strategic work to prevent duplication and improve consistency, be agreed.
- (d) That the Cabinet Member for Economic Recovery, Regeneration and Housing be designated as the member champion for the response to the cost-of-living emergency.
- (e) That the Economic Recovery, Regeneration and Housing Working Party act as the multi-agency partnership task and finish group to deliver the response to the cost-of-living emergency, and that representation on the Working Party also include Group Leaders, Cabinet Members and relevant partners and stakeholders, in order to pool resources and maximise the impact of this work.
- (f) That a co-produced action plan be developed as part of the response to the cost-of-living emergency, with clear lines of reporting and accountability to focus activity and prioritise tasks.
- (g) That the response to the cost-of-living emergency seek to improve access to support services, making them easier to access for all who need them, with particular focus on inclusivity.
- (h) That the response to the cost-of-living emergency consider the impact of the crisis on mental health and ensures that work activity takes account of this element of wellbeing.

**Chair:** \_\_\_\_\_

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