

CABINET 30 NOVEMBER 2022

MEMBER QUESTIONS

Councillor Heather Kidd

South Shropshire Furniture Scheme faces closure at the end of March and Wrekin Housing withdraw from running it. What support will the Council put in place to make sure this valuable service continues in the face of the cost of living crisis.

This could be support in

- finding other operatives
- funding as the Council refers many to this at present
- support in accessing grant funding and expertise.

Note:

They collect donated furniture and distribute it to people in need. They also offer a range of volunteering opportunities across their sites which are valuable for those with mental illness and so on.

Response from Cllr Dean Carroll, Portfolio Holder for Growth & Regeneration:

Following a review, the Wrekin Housing Trust (Wrekin) has decided to close The Furniture Scheme store in Ludlow, whilst continuing with their Wrekin 'Reviive' stores in Shrewsbury and Oswestry. Wrekin has advised that during 2021/22 The Furniture Scheme received 11 referrals via Shropshire Council's Local Support and Prevention Fund, and just seven so far during the current financial year.

Unfortunately, the Furniture Scheme in Ludlow has not been able to break even financially in the challenging retail climate, and during the last three years made a loss of £270,818.

Wrekin have advised that they will continue to fulfil all referrals from Shropshire Council for low-cost household goods for residents in south Shropshire. The Furniture Scheme itself will still be available to residents of Ludlow and the surrounding area via their expanded online delivery service. Wrekin advises that they will also be offering a discount on delivery charges so that Ludlow residents are not penalised by the closure of their local store. They are also open to working with the community and stakeholders in Ludlow to attend events in a 'pop-up' capacity.

In light of the measures that the Wrekin Trust is putting in place to continue supporting residents in South Shropshire through their Furniture Scheme, and the low numbers of scheme referrals occurring, together

with the costs of running premises at a loss, the Council does not propose to fund additional furniture services beyond those set out here.

Councillor Peggy Mullock

At the cabinet meeting in October I highlighted the significant impact that the cost of living crisis will have on a large number of families and residents in Shropshire this winter and beyond.

As the weather gets colder, more residents will be worried about the cost of heating their homes and affording essentials due to rising costs. OBR data predicts that real household disposable income is predicted to fall by 4.3% in 2022/23, which is the largest drop since records began in 1956. The impact on residents' health and wellbeing is predicted to be significant.

Can you provide a further update on the support available locally for residents and from Shropshire Council for its own staff?

Response from Councillor Gwilym Butler, Portfolio Holder Finance and Corporate Resources

Thank you for your question

Shropshire's Social Task Force

The Social Taskforce made up of partners from across Shropshire including the Council, and its subgroups, have continued to meet.

Cost of Living Communications

The Cost-of-living Communications group have been developing communications to support residents with the Cost of living. They are ensuring that the Cost-of-living website is kept updated. A targeted leaflet campaign has been developed and they are working on a video and social media campaign to help residents access the support they need, particularly over the Christmas and new year period. The first video's will focus on stigma and energy

Cost of Living Training for frontline staff and volunteers who are supporting residents

Partners including Shropshire Council, Community Resource, the Shropshire Food Poverty Alliance, Age UK, Community Resource, Marches Energy Agency, and Shropshire Citizens' Advice have developed a 2-hour online training session. The training is available on the Shropshire Council YouTube channel <https://youtu.be/oDQaCScx5p4>.

Cost of Living Helpline

The helpline, based within Shropshire Customer Services, has been making targeted calls to households most vulnerable to the cost-of-living

crisis, alongside inbound calls. To date, just under 3500 households have been contacted to advise of help available and to establish needs and further households are being identified from the Council's databases. The helpline number for inbound calls is being communicated through key venues and partners and via targeted leafleting

Shropshire Warm Welcome

Over 70 venues across Shropshire have registered as Warm Welcome venues. Packs including a logo and signposting information have been sent out to venues. The Cost-of-living team are continuing to seek funding opportunities to support these venues with additional costs.

Cost of Living Data

We are developing a dashboard to continue to track the impact on our residents and the support offered.

Support for families

Children entitled to Free School Meals were supported from the Household Support Fund with the cost of food over the October half-term and will again receive support in the Winter and Spring half-term.

The Holiday Activities and Food Programme (HAF) will be open again over the Winter holiday to enable children and young people aged 4 (in reception class) to 16, who are eligible for benefits-related free school meals (FSM) and for those who have been referred by a professional to access free holiday activity.

Support for Shropshire Council Staff

- Working with the Web Team to develop a Cost-of-Living Hub for staff which will signpost to local and national support.
- Working with the Money and Pension Service who will deliver a webinar around the cost of living: 'Managing Money in Uncertain Times' – to be delivered on Tuesday 6th December. The webinar will be recorded for those that are unable to attend and placed on the Wellbeing Pages.
- Promotion of [HSBC's Cost of living](#) webinars.
- Staff were awarded a [pay award](#) in November 2022, which was backdated from April 2022.
- An internal cost of living workforce group are meeting this week to explore what further support can be given to staff on a short, medium and long term basis.