



Cabinet
14 November 2022

**Report from the Corporate Director
of Resident Services**

Cost of Living Crisis: Supporting Residents with a Warm Place in Brent this Winter

Wards Affected:	All
Key or Non-Key Decision:	Non-key
Open or Part/Fully Exempt: (If exempt, please highlight relevant paragraph of Part 1, Schedule 12A of 1972 Local Government Act)	Open
No. of Appendices:	One Appendix 1 Draft Library Lounge Leaflet
Background Papers:	Cost of Living Crisis & the Resident Support Fund Report made to Cabinet by the Strategic Director of Customer and Digital Services (20 June 2022)
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1.0 Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 This report provides Cabinet with an update on the actions the Council is taking to help mitigate the impact of the Cost-of-Living crisis on our residents, specifically the issue of rising energy bills this winter.
- 1.2 Resources of the Council and its partners are being made available to offer temporary refuge, respite and support for Brent residents in “Library Lounges” for residents who may be struggling with fuel poverty this winter as part of the national “Warm Welcome Campaign”.

- 1.3 The Council is working closely with the voluntary, faith and community sectors to ensure a joined-up approach across the Borough.
- 1.4 Furthermore, this report updates Cabinet on future planned activities to support residents and outlines how officers will monitor the ongoing impact of this aspect of the Cost-of-Living crisis on people in Brent through reviews with key partners across the borough.

2.0 Recommendations for Cabinet

It is recommended that:

- 2.1 Cabinet note that the Council network of “Warm Welcome Spaces” has commenced with the Council’s libraries registered on the warm welcome national website.
- 2.2 Cabinet note that work is under way to develop a cohesive joint offer for residents to access support, advice, warmth and temporary refuge or respite through the network of “Warm Welcome Spaces”.
- 2.3 Cabinet note that the Council will work with partners across Brent to maximise impact and map where offers of support meet the needs and demands of Brent residents.
- 2.4 Cabinet note that a Council Project Group has been established reporting to the Council’s Cost of Living Crisis working group, to monitor the take up and impact of the Warm Welcome Spaces approach. Representatives include Customer Access, Public Health, Strategy and Partnerships, CYP: Early Help, ASC, and the Communications Team.
- 2.5 Cabinet note that meetings of the Group will take place as the autumn and winter season progresses; in order that the impact of actions can be (re)worked, (re)considered and monitored.
- 2.6 Cabinet note that Facilities Management will prioritise maintenance of heating systems across the Council’s estate to maintain the Council’s public offer.
- 2.7 Cabinet note the proposal to progress the action plan tasks to the proposed timetable.
- 2.8 Cabinet note that pursuant to and within the exercise of the delegated authority of the Corporate Director of Resident Services, limited financial support will be made available in the form of “Warm Welcome Spaces Grants” to community, faith and voluntary groups who make space available throughout the winter season and meet the criteria to offer a Warm Welcome spaces that is inclusive, non-judgmental, and where everyone can expect a warm welcome from staff and volunteers.
- 2.9 Cabinet delegate authority to the Corporate Director of Resident Services in

consultation with the Cabinet Member for Community Engagement, Equalities and Culture to set the eligibility criteria in respect of the funds available within the Council's current budget for a "Warm Welcome Spaces Grant".

3.0 Background

- 3.1 Since late 2021, the UK has experienced a rise in the cost of living for individuals and families. For many Brent residents, this means having to make difficult decisions on how they spend their income, which can have a negative impact on their standard of living and can mean making difficult choices. "between heating and eating."¹
- 3.2 In a recent attitudes survey², increased energy bills were a major concern for people already struggling with mortgage or rent payments. Of those surveyed, the groups that were most likely to say their costs had risen a lot included those on low incomes, Black and Asian residents, those renting from a council, and those with a health problem or disability. For full details, see the "Cost of Living Crisis & the Resident Support Fund Report" made to Cabinet by the Strategic Director of Customer and Digital Services (20 June 2022).
- 3.3 As was seen during the pandemic, local community groups and organisations have or are beginning to rise to the challenge and support their neighbours through the cost of living crisis in particular those who are or who will struggle to heat their homes or cook food. This includes groups with spaces, or those who are able to provide furnishings, activities, advice and support.
- 3.4 The Council starts from a good position by already having in place a number of physical resources and mechanisms to support residents who may be struggling financially with utility bills or are unable to heat their homes when they need to. These include:
 - **Brent Libraries**, including a museum and gallery spaces, are often a vital first point of contact for vulnerable groups. Staff and volunteers have experience of welcoming people into warm public library spaces. The service will continue to lead by example by ensuring that those visitors and residents who need it most, will feel comfortable in using the library spaces without any stigma. Libraries are using the guidance in "A Warm Welcome"³ which maps out six key areas of 'hosting' in this crisis: "serving, maintaining the big picture, taking responsibility, caring, knowledge and dialogue."
 - **Brent Libraries Outreach / Home Library Service Volunteers** Will help identify and refer residents who are in hardship or in need of any financial

¹ Martin Lewis in "A Warm Welcome" - guidelines compiled by CILIP and written by Marsha Lowe, Oxygen Arts and Ayub Khan MBE, Warwickshire County Council, funded by a personal donation from the Martin Lewis charity fund. © CILIP 2022

² Source: YouGov (for GLA). Sample: 1188 adults. Fieldwork 21-26 Jan 2022 - carried out online. The figures were weighted to be representative of all London adults (aged 18+). Data available on [GLA datastore](#).

³ "A Warm Welcome" © CILIP 2022

assistance with heating or fuel costs. Staff will ensure volunteers are supported with the information they need to refer residents they visit in their home to relevant services, e.g. Brent Hubs. Staff and volunteers have received training from **Make Every Contact Count**.

- **Brent Hubs** have in place mechanisms to issue vouchers to residents in need of urgent food and fuel support. This is in addition to referrals to food aid agencies and schemes for support with the cost of utilities.

The Brent **Resident Support Fund** (RSF), is focused on supporting residents to address their financial problems. Financial support received through the RSF will be contingent on residents agreeing to engage with support services. Furthermore, the Government's Household Support Fund (HSF) has been used to provide support to Brent households with the cost of food and fuel in the form of food and fuel vouchers, grants, and financial support to food aid organisations. These are used to support families with supermarket vouchers during the school holidays, grant funding provided to food banks operating in Brent to support them in meeting increased demand as a result of the Pandemic and cost of living crisis.

- A **Fuel Poverty Toolkit** is available for all staff to access via the intranet. The toolkit provides an overview of local, national and independent support schemes and agencies, along with details as to how support can be accessed. Staff attended stakeholder briefings sessions which helped to raise awareness of the options that are available to residents who need help with the rising energy costs.
- A **Financial Support leaflet** was delivered to all households within the borough to help increase awareness of the schemes and mechanisms available to residents who are struggling with the cost of living. These will continue to be offered in libraries and partner organisations.
- The delivery of a number of Borough Plan funded **Financial Inclusion projects**, including a financial capability upskilling programme targeting community leaders, training to upskill Brent hubs staff and residents in debt management, and the delivery of a financial inclusion learning programme for residents.
- The **Employment, Skills and Enterprise** service help upskill residents to support them moving into work. This includes gaining qualifications via Brent Start (ESOL, English, Maths & Digital Skills), digital equipment loans, and financial support towards childcare.
- **Digital Inclusion** supports households or Brent pupils with access to a digital device and digital skills training. There are digital cafes at three Brent Hubs and with 100 digital champions in place. Brent continues to work with internet providers to improve access to fibre through social tariffs.

- **Libraries Connected**, the independent charity representing public libraries, has outlined how libraries plan to help those struggling with household bills this winter. Libraries Connected has called on Government for dedicated funding for the whole winter so that library services can provide targeted help to those most in need.
- **Martin Lewis**, Money Saving Expert, commissioned the **Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals** (CILIP). They researched and collated best practice information on how libraries, and any organisation wanting to set up a warm space, could respond to the soaring rise in energy bills. They released guidance in mid-October 2022 and is being used by libraries to ensure best practice in welcoming everyone and identifying those who might need extra support.
- Universal support from the UK **Government** to help with energy bills. Implementation began in October 2022 with no requirement for individuals to re-pay. Pensioner households who receive winter fuel support will also get a one-off payment. The government will make these payments directly to pensioner households. Recipients of disability benefits will also receive a one-off payment.
- Brent colleagues are working on an **Affordable Warmth Provision** developing an advisory service to support those effected by fuel poverty; providing impartial energy advice to help residents stay warm, save money and live greener. This work builds on the offer set out in the Fuel Poverty toolkit, including referral pathways to organisations such as independent advisory agencies. It involves exploring how front line services (especially those who go into homes) might help to identify and refer residents who are in hardship and developing a central referral point though Brent Hubs. Any financial assistance with heating or fuel costs will be contingent on a visit by this team.
- On 1 October 2022, the Government launched the **Energy Bills Relief Scheme**, which will provide support with energy costs relief to eligible organisations until the 31 March 2023. In parallel, the Government has also launched a three-month review, which will identify businesses and organisations most at risk from higher energy costs that will still require support after 31 March 2023. As part of this review of the Energy Bills Relief Scheme, the Government will engage with businesses, organisations and trade associations across the UK so that we can better understand energy needs, including through the use of a survey.

4.0 A Warm Welcome Network in Brent

- 4.1 The Warm Welcome Campaign exists to support and champion the community response to the Cost of Living crisis. Working with partners of all kinds, they equip thousands of organisations across the country to network with other organisations who are able to provide a warm welcome to everyone who might need it this winter.

The campaign was started by the ChurchWorksCommission.
<https://www.warmwelcome.uk>

- 4.2 A project group Customer Access, Public Health, Emergency Planning, CYP: Early Help, ASC: Health, the Communications Team, has begun marketing and promoting the offer. This will be expanded to include other partners and colleagues working across Brent.
- 4.3 Customer Access will develop this group into an operational practitioners' network, bringing together key staff and volunteers from across the council and its partners who are able to – or able to support the provision of - a space or activity to help mitigate the rising cost of domestic energy bills. The outcome is to share learning and respond appropriately.
- 4.4 In addition, the Council will work with the Council's thematic Consultative Forums to ensure the borough wide offer is inclusive.
 - Brent Disability Forum
 - Service User Consultative Forum - Equality
 - Service User Consultative Forum - Pensioners
 - Service User Consultative Forum - Private Sector Housing
 - Service User Consultative Forum - Voluntary Sector
- 4.5 A warm welcome space should be free to use and encouraging for residents to stay as long as they want. It needs to be a friendly, comfortable environment where people feel at ease and at home.
- 4.6 Much of the work outlined in this paper – completed, ongoing and planned aligns with an exigent and tentative approach that seeks to build a coalition of support across the borough. It is acknowledged that simply providing a warm space is far from the answer. Not everyone will be able to get to warm spaces; not everyone will want to, and people will still need to heat their homes. The offer is based on encouraging human kindness and communal approaches to a crisis that can provide crucial extra help to ensure a decent number of vulnerable residents will be able to get through the winter.

October to December	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Libraries liaise with Libraries Connected, CILIP (the UK's library and information association and the London Libraries Network)• Create additional spaces in libraries, museum and galleries to respond to any increase in demand• Develop communication resources• Libraries liaise with FM to ensure heating/boiler functions• Customer Access initiate Council officer with CABINET
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Mapping the emerging offer of organisations on https://www.warmwelcome.uk/ across the borough and the country stepping forward to support people experiencing difficulties• Review and develop – scale-up or scale-down
January to	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Monitor and review need and take up.

March	
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- 4.7 Limited financial support will be made available in the form of Council “Warm Welcome Spaces Grants” to community, faith and voluntary groups who make space available throughout the winter season and meet the criteria to offer a Warm Welcome spaces that is inclusive, non-judgmental, and where everyone can expect a warm welcome from staff and volunteers. The eligibility criteria will be defined by the the Corporate Director of Resident Services in consultation the Lead Member as set out in paragraph 2.9 above with eligible Groups able to apply for one off funding.

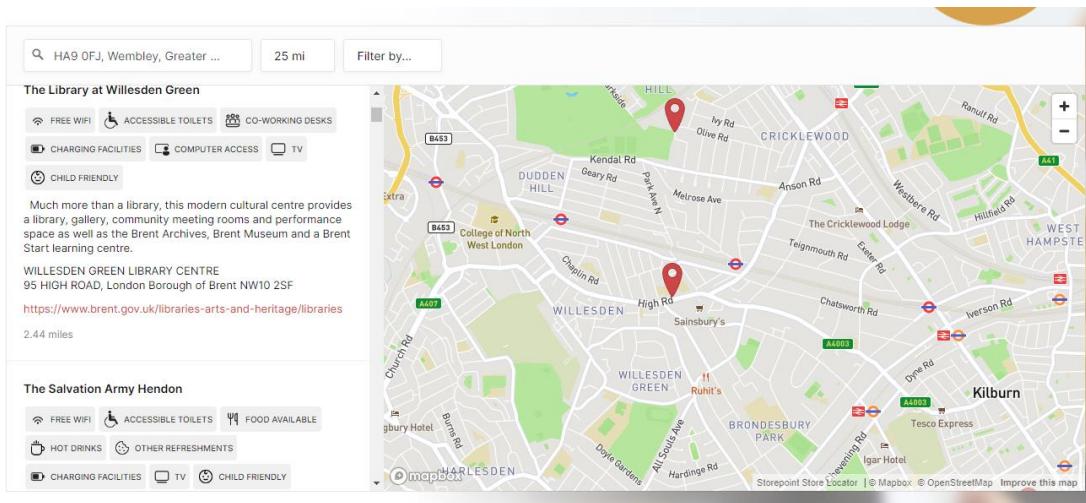
5.0 Next Steps

- 5.1 The Cost of Living Crisis is a national issue. As outlined in section 3, the Council already has a number of resources and mechanisms in place to support residents experiencing financial difficulties. The next step is to work with a range of partners and external organisations to ensure mapping of emerging offers of support and encourage those who can help to do so.

6.0 Mapping Offers of Help in Brent

- 6.1 All six of Brent’s libraries will be welcoming warm spaces where people are invited to gather and spend time in the warmth, without having to put their heating on at home. The libraries will be mapped and publicised on [warmwelcome.uk](#) website, which shows locations, where residents can visit to stay warm. The website has a number of organisations across the borough and the country offering similar services.

An example of how each offer is mapped can be seen below:



- 6.2 The national website has already been launched by the ChurchWorks Commission. It includes an interactive map of Warm Welcome spaces. The website has over 1,600 registered organisations that have opened or are opening up free, warm, welcoming spaces for the public over the winter across the UK. Organisations in Brent have also began to emerge on the website.

- 6.3 All six of Brent's libraries with information about the Hubs and other services have been uploaded to the site. The Web Team will be able to update this link onto Brent's website for residents to view.
- 6.4 Developing a marketing leaflet to explain its offer will encourage others with buildings to register with the national warmwelcome.uk website. See Appendix One using the national warm welcome.

7.0 Improving access to existing services

- 7.1 There is likely to be significant demand for spaces especially at peak times. The library opening times are a key part of helping to mitigate the cost of living crisis.
- 7.2 There are currently no plans to extend opening hours beyond our current closing times (see below). The Libraries services will monitor the take-up and consider any amendments.
- 7.3 Trusted partners may be able to help with after core hours access.

Library	Opening hours:
Ealing Road Library	Monday to Friday: 10:30am to 6pm Saturday: 10:30am to 5pm Sunday: 12pm to 5pm
Harlesden Library - Designworks	Harlesden Library will be closed for building works between 29 August and February 2023.
Kilburn library	Monday to Friday: 10:30am to 6pm Saturday: 10:30am to 5pm Sunday: 12pm to 5pm
Kingsbury Libraray	Monday to Friday: 10:30am to 6pm Saturday: 10:30am to 5pm Sunday: 12pm to 5pm
The Library at Willesden Green	Monday to Friday: 10:30am to 8pm Saturday: 10:30am to 5pm Sunday: 12pm to 5pm
Wembley library	Monday to Friday: 10:30am to 8pm Saturday: 10:30am to 5pm Sunday: 12pm to 5pm

8.0 Monitoring

- 8.1 The project group will network and liaise with the Cost of Living Crisis working group who are responsible for monitoring any impact indicators related to this crisis in order to inform appropriate cross-council responses.

9.0 Financial Implications

- 9.1 Limited financial support will be made available in the form of "Warm Welcome

Spaces Grants” to community, faith and voluntary groups who make space available throughout the winter season and meet the criteria to offer a Warm Welcome spaces that is inclusive, non-judgmental, and where everyone can expect a warm welcome from staff and volunteers.

- 9.2 The eligibility criteria for the award scheme will be determined by the Corporate Director of Resident Services in consultation with the Lead Member as set out in paragraph 2.9 of this report and payments of the grants will be made within the Corporate Director’s current delegations to allocate Cost of Living Support Grants within the Council’s current budget.

10.0 Legal Implications

- 10.1 The Corporate Director of Resident Services has the power to make the grants that are set out and proposed in paragraph 2.9 of this report. Under paragraph 9 in the Table under paragraph 9.5 in Part 3 of the Council’s Constitution, the Corporate Director for Resident Services (and any Corporate Director) has the power “to make grants or give other financial or other assistance to organisations” subject to the following restrictions:
 - (a) Provided that if the grant or other financial assistance involves the grant of funds from Council’s own resources (i) the relevant Director is satisfied that no adverse capital finance or other negative implications would arise, unless written consent of the Corporate Director, Finance and Resources is obtained. (ii) no grant shall be made by officers if it amounts to more than £25k per annum except in the case of Neighbourhood Infrastructure Level grants which may be made by the Corporate Director of Communities and Regeneration up to the value of £100k. (iii) no grant shall be withdrawn or reduced by officers if the receiving body has received a grant from the Council for each of the last five years for the same purpose unless such withdrawal is due to the fact that the body no longer meets the relevant grant criteria or conditions of grant. (iv) the grant criteria has been approved by the Cabinet other appropriate body or person with appropriate authority. (v) no grant shall be made by officers from the council’s Voluntary Sector Initiative Fund except with the prior approval of the Cabinet.
 - (b) Provided that where the grant or other financial assistance involves the distribution of funds received from a third party the grant or other financial assistance complies with the conditions under which the funds have been received by the Council.

- 10.2 Further legal advice will be provided in relation to individual projects as and when necessary and appropriate.

11.0 Equality Implications

- 11.1 Equality implications will be considered for individual projects at the appropriate time.

Related Document:

Cost of Living Crisis & the Resident Support Fund Report made to Cabinet by the Strategic Director of Customer and Digital Services (20 June 2022)

Report sign off:

Peter Gadsdon
Corporate Director of Resident
Services