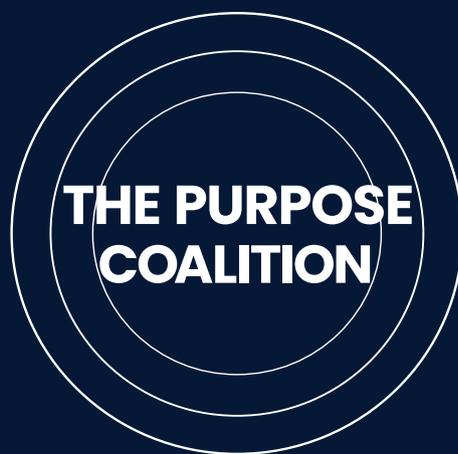


# The Purpose Coalition's Cost-of-Living Taskforce

Cost-of-Living Action Plan



Proudly run by  
**this is  
purpose**

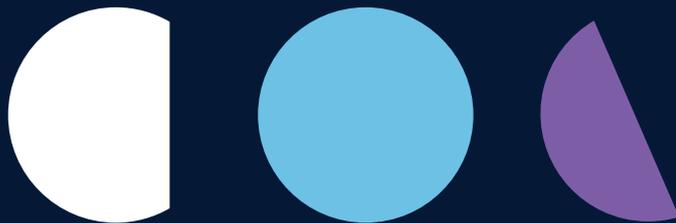


**THE PURPOSE  
COALITION**

# The Purpose Coalition

5 ideas to tackle  
the cost-of-living crisis





# Contents

|   |    |
|---|----|
| Foreword - Lord Walney  | 10 |
| Executive Summary   | 12 |
| Analysis of Purpose Coalition Activity                            | 14 |
| Recommendations   | 17 |
| Private Sector Best Practice from<br>Across the Purpose Coalition | 36 |





## About the Author

John Woodcock, Lord Walney, is Chair of the Purpose Business Coalition and the Purpose Coalition's Cost-of-Living Taskforce.

Lord Walney is a crossbench peer and former Labour MP. He served as an adviser to the last Labour Government in a number of Whitehall departments, including as political spokesman for Gordon Brown in 10 Downing Street as the then Prime Minister led the international response to the global recession.

# About the Purpose Coalition's Cost-of-Living Taskforce

The Purpose Coalition is presenting this report in association with the Wise Group; the UK's leading relational mentoring social enterprise.

Every year the Wise Group meaningfully supports over 65,000 households to break the cycle of poverty, at home, at work and in the community.

Through this crisis, the organisation has had millions of conversations, saved millions of pounds in household savings and wiped millions of pounds of debt – all through mentoring and relationships.

Last year, it found that people in fuel poverty were involuntarily becoming the greenest in society – 26 percent of interviewees said they were self-disconnecting or rationing. This year so far, over 90 percent of those it spoke to said they struggle to pay their bills.

This winter, people's mental and physical health has hit a breaking point as the choice between heating and eating has become a daily reality. Children are being hospitalised, medical equipment is being turned off, pensioners are forgoing food, all while unprecedented levels of financial support are being rolled out to prevent a complete disaster. Quick fixes are fixing little, and not for very long.

One of the starkest findings of the Wise Group 2022 report was that over two-thirds of people on prepayment meters said their physical health had been impacted by the cost-of-living crisis or preferred not to say, compared to less than 50 percent on other payment types. Foodbank use was also 50 percent greater for those on prepayment meters than those on other payment types. Fear of being cut off has reached extreme levels, with one individual reporting that they had hoarded £600 on their prepayment meter out of fear of going without energy, and had rationed food to do so.

It also found that half of working families are visiting food banks as the cost-of-living crisis continues to hit communities of all ages. Families with young children have been hit hardest, with four in five single parents saying their mental health had been impacted by the crisis, with families with children the only group to ration energy more than food. Eighty percent of disabled people reported that their physical health has deteriorated as a result of rising bills, and over 77 percent of people said that their mental health had been impacted by spiralling costs.







## Thanks

We are grateful to all the individuals and organisations who spoke with us and shared their evidence around the rising cost-of-living to support the development of this report.

## About the Wise Group

The Purpose Coalition is presenting this report in association with the Wise Group; the UK's leading relational mentoring social enterprise.

Every year the Wise Group meaningfully supports over 65,000 households to break the cycle of poverty, at home, at work and in the community.

Throughout this crisis, the organisation has had millions of conversations, saved millions of pounds in household savings and wiped millions of pounds of debt – all through mentoring and relationships.



# Foreword

## Lord Walney



The rising cost-of-living has dominated the political and economic agenda for the past year. From people and businesses facing terrifying increases to their energy bills, to the rising cost of everyday items in the supermarket.

The factors driving the problem may be largely global - from global quantitative easing during the pandemic, to Putin's war in Ukraine - but that doesn't make it any less of a problem for people and businesses at home.

It is right that the government has stepped in with significant support, including capping the unit cost of energy and providing direct payments to the most vulnerable households.

Whilst inflation is expected to ease this year, the effects of the cost-of-living crisis are here to stay, and the government simply cannot write a blank cheque to continue providing support. The UK needs to find new ways to support people and businesses, harnessing the power of both public and private sector innovation.



Recent years have seen businesses move from the old model of corporate social responsibility, where doing good was seen as a bolt-on to a company's core purpose, to a more progressive approach, where a narrow focus on the bottom line is not only wrong, but self-defeating.

Our members across public and private sectors have responded admirably to the cost-of-living crisis that has gripped countries across the world, finding ways to help their customers, their colleagues and the communities in which they are embedded. But all are seized by the need to put our economy on a sounder footing for the long term, to help individuals build up greater resilience to the shocks in this uncertain global environment that can put such strain on our lives and the nation's finances.

That's why in recent months, I have convened the Cost-of-Living Taskforce - made up of the most innovative Purpose Coalition Members who are going above and beyond to help their customers, colleagues and communities with the rising cost-of-living. From great British institutions such as the Co-op and Virgin Money, to universities and local authorities across the country, it is clear that innovative and purpose-led organisations see this as the moment to play their part in helping Britain through its biggest challenge.

Government, public institutions and private sector working together to provide immediate support to help people through this crisis is vital. But it is equally important to think now about how we can increase the long term resilience of individuals and the country against future financial shocks. This report sets out five recommendations designed to help organisations and citizens to protect themselves better from future shocks that can knock the UK off course.

We need to harness the fresh thinking and the commitment of our brightest and best to ensure Britain weathers this storm, and this report can be a blueprint to start the UK on that journey.



# Executive Summary

The cost-of-living crisis is an issue that will likely define the current socio-economic period we are living through. It affects almost all in society, with a very slim minority financially resilient enough to be exempt from the wide-reaching impacts.

In the short-term, people are struggling to heat their homes, to eat balanced and healthy meals, to get to work every day, to put money away, and to look after their children. In the medium to long term, the current pressures are threatening to affect people's financial resilience for years to come.

We are also likely to experience an increase in people accessing mental health support from a system that is already under acute pressures. On the back of a survey by the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP), two thirds of therapists - 66 percent - reported the rises in the cost-of-living contributing to a decline in people's mental health<sup>1</sup>. The survey of BACP members also found that 61 percent of therapists say their clients are anxious about affording their household bills and 52 percent of therapists reporting clients losing sleep due to money worries<sup>2</sup>.

The issue is vast - and unfortunately likely to continue well into 2024.

---

<sup>1</sup>News from BACP, cost-of-living Crisis: Survey shows Impact on Mental Health, British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy, 8th September 2022, <<https://www.bacp.co.uk/news/news-from-bacp/2022/8-september-cost-of-living-crisis-survey-shows-impact-on-mental-health/>> [15/02/23] <sup>2</sup>''



So much is being done on the ground right now. As fiscal constraints rein in government spending, Purpose Coalition members are working hard to support their customers, their colleagues and the communities in which they operate.

Purpose Coalition members have acted swiftly and effectively to address the cost-of-living crisis that has stunned countries across the globe; exploring ways to support their customers, their colleagues and the communities in which they operate.

All of our members are gripped by the need to strengthen the economy for the long term, to help individuals build up greater resilience to the effects of an uncertain international environment that can cause such a strain on our lives and the nation's finances.

While the Government is attempting to balance the budget, it must listen and form stronger partnerships with organisations in the private sector who are leading the way in immediate financial support and longer term thinking. Increased collaboration would give organisations across the country the green light and the necessary resources to help individuals and families who are struggling.

We are proposing a number of private-sector supported interventions. These recommendations are aimed at taking advantage of the experience and expertise that is a feature of all industries across the UK, and will be key to the recovery of the country.



# Analysis of Purpose Coalition Activity

The Cost-of-Living Taskforce has brought together many members of the Purpose Coalition who are taking impressive immediate measures to secure the short-term financial situation and overall wellbeing of the most vulnerable.

In the higher education sector, the University of Northampton is delivering a best-in-class student support package, underpinned by in-depth data. In September 2022, the University formed its own localised Cost-of-Living Taskforce, partnering with a range of key student, colleague and community stakeholders. This has allowed the institution to deliver a comprehensive agenda, wide-ranging in its scope, not only for its students but for the wider Northampton community.

As an energy solutions organisation, operating in some of the most acute social mobility coldspots across the UK, SMS has acknowledged its responsibility to deliver for its employees during this time. It is an accredited Living Wage employer, going above and beyond the minimum of the Living Wage several months in advance of the inflationary pressures taking hold last year. This set up its colleagues to be more resilient over the tough winter months, and offers a best practice example to its industry peers in the importance of the colleague offering in overall productivity of the business and the wellbeing of employees.

UK Power Networks (UKPN) recently piloted a scheme in partnership with SCOPE, a disabled persons charity focusing on equality. Taking place between November and December last year, the Credit Meter Fuel Voucher Scheme focused on handing out strategic vouchers for households where disabled customers are living, particularly those currently in arrears on their bills.

The process began with an offering of fuel vouchers to customers to save on their bills. UKPN also offered a meeting to each of these customers to provide additional support, advice and information. UKPN estimates through this scheme customers have saved an average of £550 on their household bills, with over £6,000 issued in vouchers over the month-long period. UKPN also conducted customer feedback in a survey after the scheme, receiving 100 percent positive feedback - 77 percent of respondents reported finding the process 'Very Positive', with 23 percent finding the scheme 'Positive'.



The very best, industry-leading, purpose-led organisations are going further. Not only are they looking to help those for whom they are directly responsible, to weather and navigate the current storm, but are exploring and implementing strategies to foster long-term resilience.

The Co-op, for example, is leading the way through internalising financial wellbeing and resilience as a long-term organisational pillar. Through regular engagement with colleagues the Co-op has been able to understand and act, developing a strategic package to address the specific needs of its colleagues.

Not only does the Co-op pay the Real Living Wage as a standard to all employees, it has developed an extensive financial resilience programme - WageStream - allowing colleagues to access extra pay between paydays. The programme has been used by more than 13,000 colleagues to date.

The Co-op also offers an impressive internal Rental Deposit Scheme. Through the scheme, colleagues can apply for an interest-free deposit loan to help with the cost of renting a home. Employees can receive a maximum of 80 percent of earnings over a 4 week-period, with repayments taken directly from their salary over the next ten month period after the loan is received. As illustrated through this scheme, the Co-op is trail-blazing in colleague support and in facilitating long-term resilience amongst its colleagues - operating as a best practice model to all like-minded purpose-driven organisations.

These measures put the rest of the country and the economy on a better footing moving forward, through prioritising the needs of customers, communities, colleagues and students. The effect of this is two-fold; the short term wellbeing of these groups in being able to adequately support themselves, and the wider long-term economic and social benefit of further resilience to future crises.

The Purpose Coalition's Cost-of-Living Taskforce will be continuing to expand its work in this area. Looking forward, we are currently developing plans in partnership with leading Coalition member Staffordshire University, to explore a pilot Learners' Needs Survey - with a view to expand this to all University Coalition Members. This will offer direct insight into student challenges specific to the recent rises in the cost-of-living.





# Recommendations

Over 2023-2024, the Government is planning to extend support to target the most vulnerable with an extra £26 billion in payments to an estimated 8 million eligible households on Universal Credit.

However, the acute rises in the cost-of-living are threatening to affect almost all households, especially lower and middle earners. The Government needs to take deliberate actions, well-targeted to the people and communities that need it the most.

The Purpose Coalition has put together five clear recommendations for the Government to address the cost-of-living crisis in the short term, ahead of Chancellor Jeremy Hunt's Spring budget on 15th March, and develop wider financial resilience across the population to mitigate the effects of future economic troubles.



## 1. Transform Access to Cost-of-Living Support

During our work with leaders and organisations across the Purpose Coalition, we have experienced an encouraging increase in the scope and scale of support available to customers and communities.

The Government needs to explore a deeper partnership with business and the private sector. Although there is significant support available, the responsibility is currently on individuals to actively search for these mechanisms across each organisation directly. To help people and families become more resilient, the Government can do much more in signposting communities across the UK to the support that is available from the Government itself, and more widely from the private sector.

The breadth of Purpose Coalition members' work, and the data they hold on customers, is extensive. It has allowed them to develop effective support based on particular groups' circumstances.

In particular, Virgin Money's work on identifying and acting upon the poverty premium that exists for the poorest in our society has produced eye-opening data. Virgin Money have harnessed this data and the poverty premium more widely is now acting as a call to action across the organisation to deliver for this disadvantaged group.



**Through their work on the poverty premium, Virgin Money discovered worrying data:**

- 33 percent of low-income households pay for their electricity bills via more expensive non-standard payment methods, such as prepayment meters and upon receipt of a bill – compared to 20 percent of all households<sup>3</sup>.
- 22 percent of those on low incomes say that they would like home contents insurance but cannot afford it compared to just 10 percent of all consumers. This is despite poorer households being more likely to be victims of theft and burglary.<sup>4</sup>
- Due to a lack of travel options, low-income households are twice as likely as the average family to shop in pricier smaller supermarkets – 15 percent vs 7 percent<sup>5</sup>.
- 29 percent of those paying at least one poverty premium say they are skipping meals to be able to afford food<sup>6</sup>.
- 35 percent of low earners have felt forced to borrow via high-cost forms of credit such as payday loans, pawnbroking loans, and doorstep lenders, compared to 17 percent of all people<sup>7</sup>.
- 38 per cent of those on low incomes report having faced cash machine charges compared to 17 percent of all consumers<sup>8</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> Virgin Money UK Newsroom, 7 Million of Britain's Poorest Pay Over the Odds for the Essentials of Life, Virgin Money UK Plc, 6th December 2022, <<https://www.virginmoneyukplc.com/newsroom/article/poverty-premium>> [13/02/23] <sup>4-8</sup>...



Upon collection of this data, Virgin Money were able to offer strategic support to their customers who are paying poverty premiums.

However, the circulation and accessibility of this type of support on a larger scale is not centralised – making it difficult for people to take advantage of – necessitating individuals already under stress to contact each provider directly.

We recommend that the Government create a centralised platform on the ‘Help for Households’ website.

Operating similarly to Martin Lewis’ ‘Money Saving Expert’, the platform could feature a unified dashboard that would allow users to input simple details – their salary and postcode for example – and users would be shown unique information on all the support available to them across sectors. The service could also feature easy links to claim Government support, such as winter fuel or cold weather payments.

This would necessitate collaboration with all four nations in the United Kingdom working together to create a single portal for all residents. This type of partnership, in an uncertain time for the Union, offers many immediate benefits but also offers potential future opportunities for macro-level cooperation.

Approved third party offers, negotiated by the Government’s cost-of-living Tsar, could also be shown on the system, along with links for people to view specific support available in their local area – approved by upper-tier local authorities.

In creating this platform, the Government would transform the accessibility of relevant information and data from across the private and public sphere. Creating a centralised and strategic platform displaying offers specific to people’s local areas, during a time not experienced by families and communities in over a generation<sup>9</sup>.

---

<sup>9</sup>Brigid Francis- Devine et al, Rising Cost of Living in the UK, House of Commons Library, Research Briefing, 23rd January 2023



## 2. Tackling the Mental Health Crisis Affecting our Future Workforce

University is often the first time that many young adults live on their own. Many encounter challenges, some resulting in mental illness and serious impacts on their wellbeing.

Worryingly, the mental health of students across the UK seems to be worsening in recent years. Even before the cost-of-living crisis, the University Student Mental Health Survey found that of the 21,000 participants, almost half said that they have had contact with professional services for a serious psychological issue, with one in five participants currently having a mental health diagnosis<sup>10</sup>.

This data is bound to have worsened in line with the steep rises in cost-of-living, and University Purpose Coalition members themselves have continually raised these concerns.

These challenges not only deeply affect many vulnerable people in the immediate term, but also risks affecting long term damage to our workforce for years to come.

Purpose-led businesses and universities have long formed productive partnerships to maximise the employability of students. That should extend now to exploring ways to share learning and resources on mental health support which many businesses significantly strengthened during the pandemic.

Research conducted by Young Minds in August of 2022 found that the cost-of-living was the major worry for over half of young adults – 56 percent<sup>11</sup>. Those aged 20-25 were particularly concerned, with 80 percent always or often worried about earning enough<sup>12</sup>. In July 2022, Minister Chloe Smith MP said that “no specific assessment has been made on the impact on the mental health of people receiving benefits of the recent increase in the cost-of-living.”<sup>13</sup>

As shown in Figure 1, these worries are reflective of a real terms cut in maintenance loans for students across the country – most acutely felt for students in Northern Ireland who experienced a 9.9 percent real-terms reduction in maintenance loans against inflation in 2022.

---

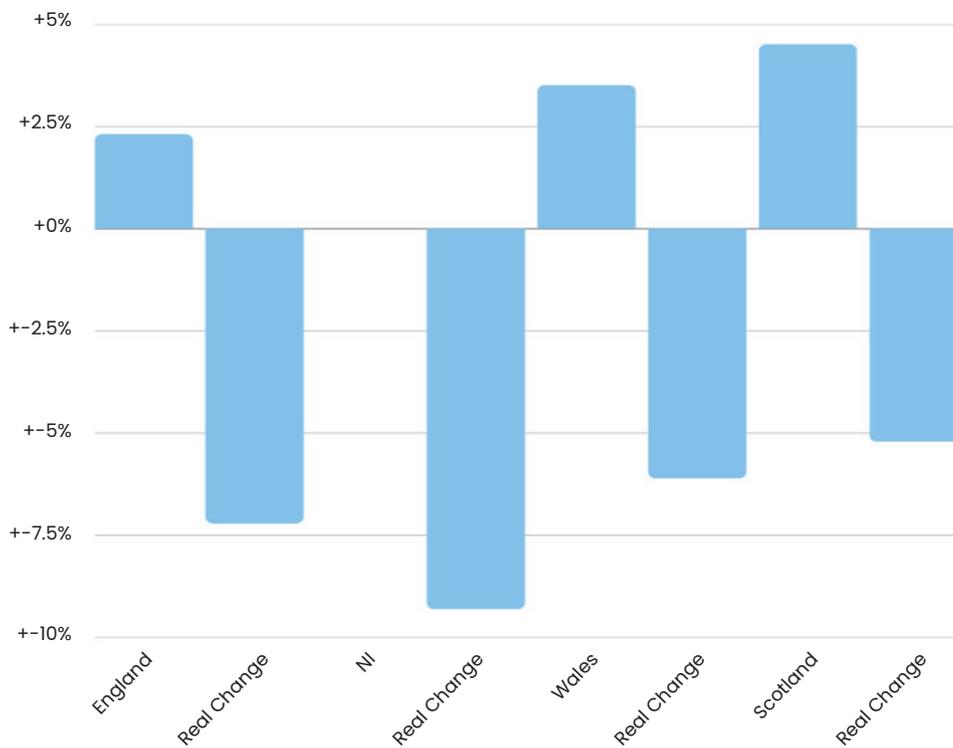
<sup>10</sup>Jemma Smith, Looking After your Mental Health at University, Prospects, January 2023, <<https://www.prospects.ac.uk/applying-for-university/university-life/looking-after-your-mental-health-at-university>> [13/02/23] <sup>11</sup>YoungMinds, Money and Mental Health, YoungMinds, August 2022, <<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1OxQZ2YTGP7KGfFrCDxgWZHfIdauigBfUKxWVbChLh2Q/edit>> [13/02/23] <sup>12</sup> <sup>13</sup> Katherine Garratt, World Mental Health Day: Rising Cost of Living and Mental Health, UK Parliament, House of Commons Library, 10th October 2022.



**Figure 1: 2022/23 Maintenance Loan Increases Compared Against Inflation**

Source: Anastasia Lewis, *How is the cost-of-living Crisis Affecting Students?*, House of Commons Library, Wednesday 14th December, 2022.

2022/23 Maintenance Loan Increases Compared Against Inflation



In acknowledgment of an oncoming potential crisis in the UK higher education system, widely regarded as world-leading, it is time to take action.

University students are the workforce of the future and a major source of income for the country even while they are studying. Despite this, there is not a joined up private sector plan of support.

Through our Purpose Coalition work, we have already experienced the significant progress that has been made in employability programmes between businesses and the higher education sector. We propose an extension of this collaboration by the private sector and the UK's universities, to provide greater targeted support for students in their time of need.

Major organisations, particularly those who prioritise strategic mental health mechanisms and programmes for their customers and colleagues, could extend this to university communities. The number of businesses offering a comprehensive wellbeing programme to its employees has grown significantly since the pandemic, with those not currently offering such schemes now in the minority.

Resilience is being built up within working populations, this should be extended to those who will soon join this cohort.

Businesses and other private sector organisations should be encouraged to financially support university hardship funds for students, especially within universities they already have close ties with. This has the benefit of both supporting local university communities and encouraging talented students to work for the sponsoring organisations post-graduation.



### 3. Increased Financial Support for Childcare

The cost of childcare is one of the biggest challenges facing the UK, with the average cost of sending one child to nursery rising now to over £13,000 a year<sup>14</sup>. An effective childcare system, where children get the best start in early years and parents can continue to work, is essential to a productive and growing economy.

Currently, the system is limiting growth, with parents on lower incomes having to work part-time or not at all, and a patchy and expensive childcare framework is having a detrimental effect on young children.

Reforming the system would provide the necessary resources to parents and families to build up resilience to current rises in the cost-of-living and future times of socio-economic hardship.

In comparable countries, parents of two are spending significantly lower proportions of their salary on childcare costs per year than in the UK<sup>15</sup>, as shown in Figure 2.

Currently, the Government only supports children over the age of three, with working parents often having to use expensive private nurseries or childminders. For those on the lowest incomes, upon finishing maternity leave and up until their child is three years old, this period is often marked by juggling part-time work and intermittent cheap private childcare – or simply not working at all while attempting to get by on universal credit alone.

Worryingly, this period is widely considered as one of the most crucial stages in the development of children.

The first 1,001 days of a baby's life – as outlined in Andrea Leadsom's 'Early Years Healthy Development Review' – from pregnancy to the age of two years old are critical, setting the foundation for cognitive, emotional and physical development<sup>16</sup>. Not only is this time vital for development, but it is also a time when children are at their most vulnerable, with heightened and longer-lasting effects as a result of their circumstances and environment<sup>17</sup>.

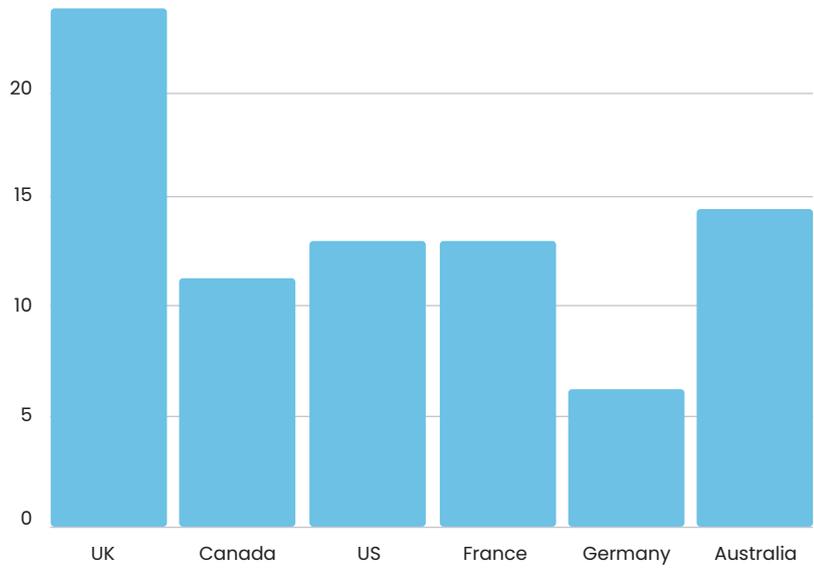
---

<sup>14</sup>Jill Rennie, Over 60% of Nurseries in England Would Raise Wages if Government Abolished Business Tax, Day Nurseries, 16th November 2022, <<https://www.daynurseries.co.uk/news/article.cfm/1679829/business-rates-nurseries-england>> [13/02/23] <sup>15</sup>Salman Haqqi, The Real Cost of Childcare Around the World, Money.co.uk, 2022, <<https://www.money.co.uk/loans/cost-of-childcare-report>> [13/02/23] <sup>16</sup>World Health Organisation, The Global Strategy for Women's, Children's, and Adolescents' Health (2016–2030), WHO, 2015. <sup>17</sup>Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, The Best Start for Life: A Vision for the 1,001 Critical Days – The Early Years Healthy Development Review Report, HM Government, March 2021.



**Figure 2:** Percentage of Yearly Income Spent on Childcare by Country

Source: Salman Haqqi, *The Real Cost of Childcare Around the World*, Money.co.uk, 2022

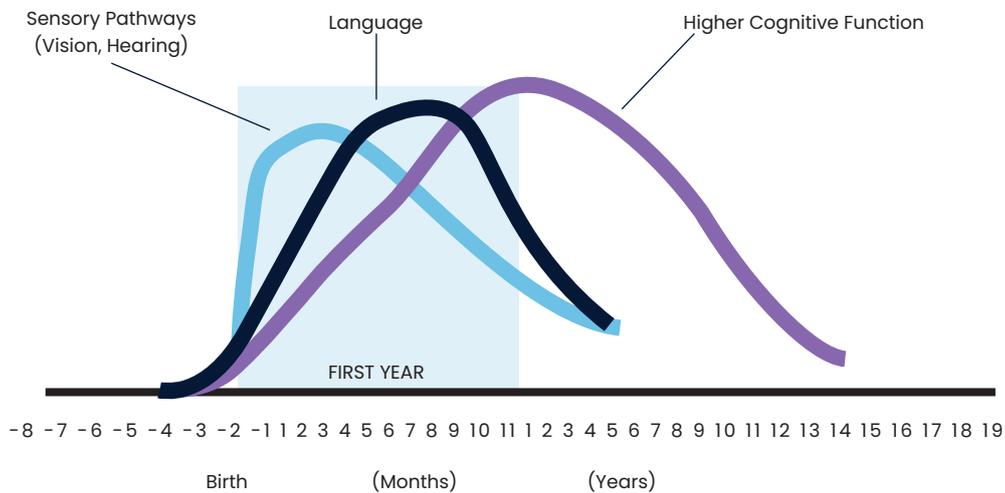


## Human Brain Development

Neural Connections for Different Functions Develop Sequentially

**Figure 3:** Early Human Brain Development

Source: Center on the Developing Child Harvard University, *The Science of Early Childhood Development*, C.A Nelson (2000).



As shown in Figure 3, the human brain significantly develops in the first year of a child's life. Therefore, regular exposure to high levels of stress in a young child's environment causes an unrelieved activation of the baby's stress management system. Without the necessary safeguarding of adult support, toxic stress can become built into the body by the processes that shape the architecture of the developing brain. This has long-term consequences for learning and a child's future physical and mental wellbeing<sup>18</sup>.

The detrimental effect uncertain circumstances have on children's early development, and the impact on productivity, parents' working hours and pay from the current system means childcare is very likely to feature in Chancellor Jeremy Hunt's Spring Budget.

We recommend the Government make childcare costs tax deductible for children above three months old. Currently this is only available at three years old, up to £7,280 a year - the equivalent of 30 hours per week, 52 weeks a year.

We also recommend that the Government increase the ceiling for eligibility to £150,000, from £100,000, to discourage higher earners from working less to keep themselves under the cap. This is particularly important for parents in London, as the average salary in 2022 in the capital was £41,866<sup>19</sup>.

---

<sup>18</sup>...

<sup>19</sup>D.Clark, Median Annual Earnings for Full-Time Employees in the United Kingdom in 2022 by region, Statista (2023).



## 4. A Royal Commission on Personal Energy Security

Energy prices have dominated the discourse surrounding the cost-of-living crisis, and for good reason.

Electricity prices in the UK rose by 65.4 percent in 2022, with gas prices rising 128.9 percent over the same period - with both operating as central drivers in the high inflation rate across the economy<sup>20</sup>.

Although the Government introduced the Energy Price Guarantee (EPG), capping energy bills per household at £2,500 per year, this guarantee is only in place until April of this year where the cap will decrease £500, down to £3,000 until April 2024<sup>21</sup>.

Despite the EPG, in 2022 low income households spent on average 15 percent of their salary on energy bills - with France and Germany both over 10 percent lower<sup>22</sup>.

Although the forcible installation of prepayment meters by energy companies systems that operate at a 6 percent higher rate than direct debit<sup>23</sup> was suspended by Ofgem in February this year while a review takes place, as of October 2022 there are 7.47 million households still using them across the UK<sup>24</sup>.

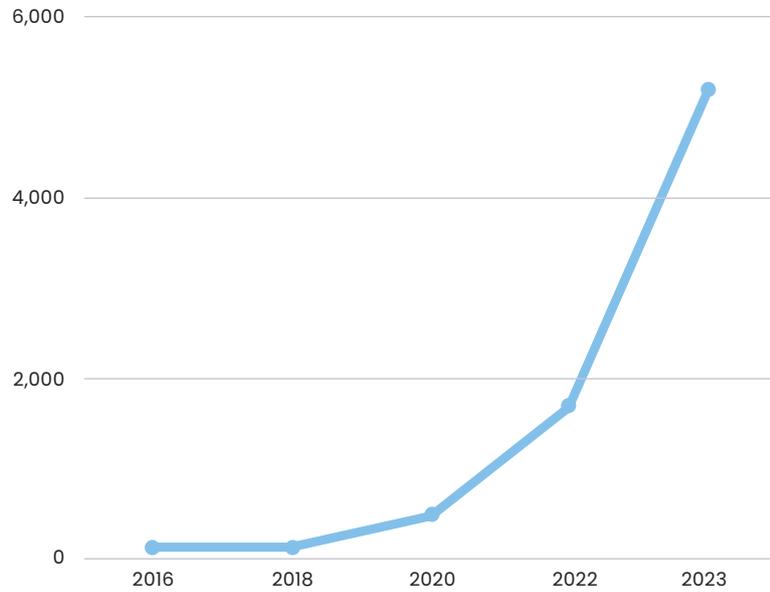
Prepayment meters force people into a direct choice between heating and eating, with an estimated 600,000 more people forcibly switched to the system in 2022 alone<sup>25</sup>. As shown in Figure 4, the rise in people reporting to Citizens Advice as being unable to top up their prepayment meter has also risen sharply since 2021.

<sup>20</sup>ONS, Cost of Living Insights: Energy, Office for National Statistics (2023), <<https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/inflationandpriceindices/articles/costoflivinginsights/energy>> [14/02/23] <sup>21</sup>Department for Business, Energy, & Industrial Strategy, Energy Price Guarantee, Gov.uk (2022), <<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/energy-bills-support/energy-bills-support-factsheet-8-september-2022>> [14/02/23] <sup>22</sup>N.Sönnichsen, Energy Costs as a Share of Total Income for Low Income Households in Selected European Countries in 2022, Statista (2022). <sup>23</sup>Virgin Money UK Newsroom, 7 Million of Britain's Poorest Pay Over the Odds for the Essentials of Life, Virgin Money UK Plc, 6th December 2022. <<https://www.virginmoneyukplc.com/newsroom/article/poverty-premium>> [13/02/23] <sup>24</sup>Jonathan Spencer Jones, Prepayment Metering Appears on the rise in Britain, Smart Energy International October 27th 2022, <<https://www.smart-energy.com/industry-sectors/smart-meters/prepayment-metering-appears-on-the-rise-in-britain/>> [13/02/23] <sup>25</sup>Alex Lawson, Call to End Forced Installation of UK Prepayment Meters After Millions Suffer Without Power, Guardian <<https://www.theguardian.com/money/2023/jan/11/call-to-end-forced-installation-of-uk-prepayment-meters-after-millions-suffer-without-power>> (2023).



**Figure 4:** The Number of People Unable to Top Up their Prepayment Meter

Source: Alex Lawson, *Call to End Forced Installation of UK Prepayment Meters After Millions Suffer Without Power*, *Guardian* (2023).





Beyond those on prepayment meters, households across the country that are on direct debit systems also have to live with a level of uncertainty – the possibility of their energy being shut off if their account builds up too much credit. YouGov reported 75 percent of respondents to a nationwide survey were planning to use less heating this winter, with 69 percent of respondents anxious about their ability to stay warm and healthy<sup>26</sup>.

The cold can have a ranging effect on people’s health – including causing or worsening respiratory, cardiovascular and mental health conditions<sup>27</sup>. It is estimated that 17 percent of people in a lower social grade had been told by a health professional to keep their home warm in the cold, compared to just 9 percent in the higher social grade<sup>28</sup>. This is also putting even further pressure on the NHS, with the Royal College of Physicians (RCP) estimating that the NHS spends at least £2.5 billion a year on treating conditions directly linked to cold, damp and dangerous homes<sup>29</sup>.

We propose a large-scale review into the personal energy resilience of households across the UK – a Royal Commission on Personal Energy Security.

---

<sup>26</sup>RCP, Over Two Thirds of Brits Worry About the Impact of Rising Energy Bills on their Ability to Stay Warm and Healthy at Home this Winter, Royal College of Physicians (2022). <sup>27</sup>RCP, Over Two Thirds of Brits Worry About the Impact of Rising Energy Bills on their Ability to Stay Warm and Healthy at Home this Winter, Royal College of Physicians (2022). <sup>28</sup>RCP, Over Two Thirds of Brits Worry About the Impact of Rising Energy Bills on their Ability to Stay Warm and Healthy at Home this Winter, Royal College of Physicians (2022). <sup>29</sup>“



Instead of continuing to lurch from crisis to crisis, with those in most need ever the most vulnerable, it is time to treat the personal energy security needed by families and individuals with the same seriousness that the Government is considering the country's energy security.

The Government should seek cross-party support to establish a Royal Commission on Personal Energy Security that will consider long-term solutions to the widespread deficiencies in the current prepayment meter installation system, including the question of whether energy should be treated like water, with disconnection banned completely in times of crisis.

These measures would provide people, families and businesses with increased certainty moving forward as, unfortunately, the acute inflationary economic pressures are likely to linger for the medium-term.

The Commission should also consider the hidden problem of voluntary disconnection highlighted by the Wise Group - in which growing numbers of lower income households are not topping up at all due to the soaring cost of energy.

We also recommend that the Government build on Ofgem's initial short-term ban on the forced installation of prepayment meters, and ban this practice for at least two years. This would allow people to prioritise their health, family and work without the threat of fuel poverty which affects each of these factors and is a significant barrier to social mobility.

For those already on prepayment meter systems, often the poorest in our society, we recommend the Government review the potential to neutralise the additional costs, totalling approximately £150 a year extra per household<sup>30</sup>. This would cost an estimated £705 million a year<sup>31</sup> - a fraction of the price of the EPG - but would be strategically targeted at the very poorest, bringing their prices in-line with those paying via direct debit.

---

<sup>30</sup>Virgin Money UK Newsroom, 7 Million of Britain's Poorest Pay Over the Odds for the Essentials of Life, Virgin Money UK Plc, 6th December 2022, <<https://www.virginmoneyukplc.com/newsroom/article/poverty-premium>> [13/02/23] <sup>31</sup>Jonathan Spencer Jones, Prepayment Metering Appears on the rise in Britain, Smart Energy International October 27th 2022, <<https://www.smart-energy.com/industry-sectors/smart-meters/prepayment-metering-appears-on-the-rise-in-britain/>> [13/02/23]



## 5. Supporting People to Build up Resilience through a Rainy-Day Savings Scheme

As of November 2022, only 9 percent of adults in the UK had £100 or less in savings, with 17 percent having nothing put away – living in debt or paycheck to paycheck<sup>32</sup>. This leaves at least 26 percent of the population critically vulnerable to the inflationary pressures affecting all day to day expenditure.

The Co-op Group, a leading partner in the Purpose Business Coalition, recently undertook a nationwide survey, contacting all 60,000 of their employees in an attempt to truly understand their financial situation and potential vulnerabilities in response to the rises in the cost-of-living. In response to the findings of the survey, the Co-op began targeted funding into employee member cards – which they can spend in store – and increased the staff discount to 30 percent. The Group has also looked to support its employees long-term in building up financial resilience and personal savings, exploring all possible routes in getting more money into struggling colleagues' pockets each month.

This focus by the Co-op upon financial resilience for the middle and lowest earners is well founded.

2.2 million more adults in the UK displayed low financial resilience in May 2022 than in February 2022<sup>33</sup>. As shown in Figure 5, those displaying characteristics of vulnerability, those specifically displaying vulnerability relating to low financial resilience, and those who are in direct financial difficulty have all increased as a percentage of the population since 2020<sup>34</sup>.

<sup>32</sup>Money and Pensions Service, One in Six Adults in the UK Have no Savings, Money and Pensions Service, Press Release 7th November 2022.

<sup>33</sup>FCA, Financial Lives 2022 Survey: Insights on Vulnerability and Financial Resilience Relevant to the Rising Cost of Living, Financial Conduct Authority, 21st October 2022. <sup>34</sup> ""



In the medium term, this needs to be addressed to facilitate wider financial resilience across the population to weather future financial storms.

The successful auto-enrolment pension scheme has been a major step forward in the last decade, supporting people saving for their retirement through private sector collaboration across all industries. This system should be examined and adapted to help people save resources they can then access when they hit hard times during their working lives.

We are recommending that the Government introduce an additional savings element to auto-enrolment, allowing it to serve as a Resilience Savings Fund in addition to saving for retirement.

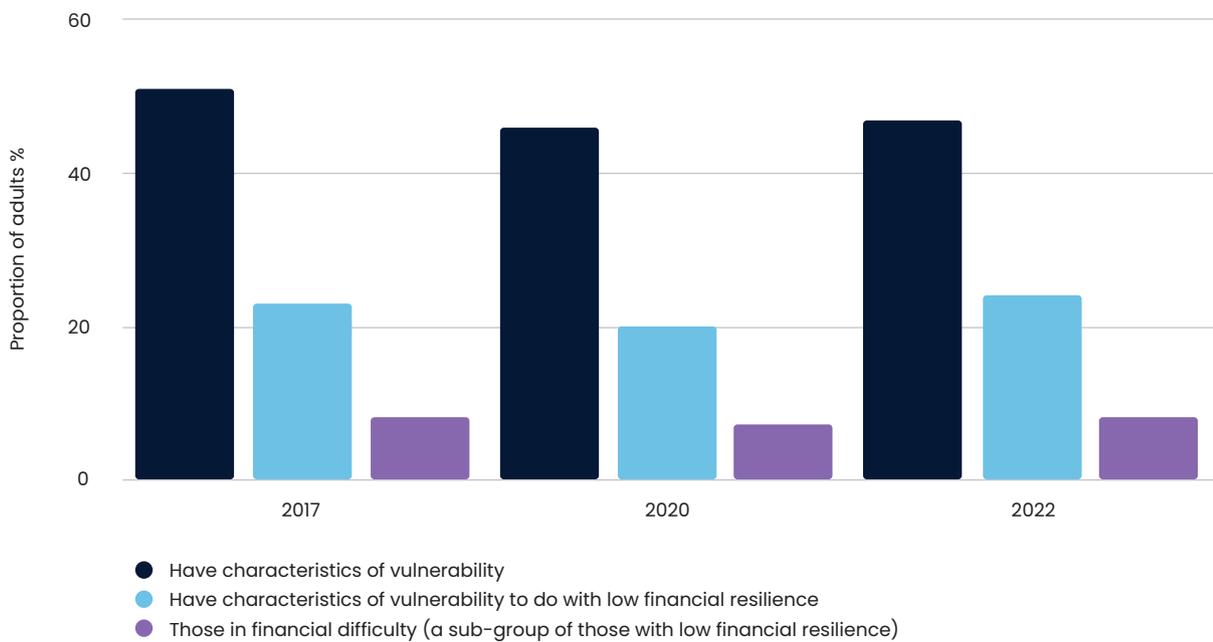
Individuals should be encouraged and incentivised to build up this pot wherever possible, in addition to their pension. We are also proposing, as is the case with the successful Help-to-Buy ISA scheme, that the Government could explore topping up any savings up to £1,000 by 25 percent.

For illustrative purposes, the average earner in the UK, £33,000 a year in 2022 – if matching the 3 percent auto-enrolled pension contribution – could put away £990 of funds over a 12 month period. On top of this, the Government 25 percent addition would take this total up to £1,237.50 in a single year.

Not only would this boost the financial resilience of the lowest earners across the country, the proposed Resilience Savings Fund acts as a further attraction of potential workers to organisations who sign up to the scheme – boosting the private sector employment offering.



**Figure 5: Vulnerability, Low Financial Resilience, and Financial Difficulty**  
Source: Financial Lives Survey 2017, 2020, 2022, Financial Conduct Authority (2022).



In the medium term, this needs to be addressed to facilitate wider financial resilience across the population to weather future financial storms.

The successful auto-enrolment pension scheme has been a major step forward in the last decade, supporting people saving for their retirement through private sector collaboration across all industries. This system should be examined and adapted to help people save resources they can then access when they hit hard times during their working lives.

We are recommending that the Government introduce an element of flexibility to the pensions savings scheme, allowing it to also serve as a Resilience Savings Fund.

Individuals should always be encouraged and incentivised to build up this pot wherever possible. We are also proposing, as is the case with the successful Help-to-Buy ISA scheme, that the Government could explore topping up any savings up to £1,000 by 25 percent.

For illustrative purposes, the average earner in the UK, £33,000 a year in 2022<sup>35</sup> – if redirecting the 3 percent auto-enrolled pension contribution from their employer – could put away £990 of funds over a 12 month period. On top of this, the Government 25 percent addition would take this total up to £1,237.50 in a single year.

Not only would this boost the financial resilience of the lowest earners across the country, the proposed Resilience Savings Fund acts as a further attraction of potential workers to organisations who sign up to the scheme – boosting the private sector employment offering.

---

<sup>35</sup>D. Clark, Average Annual Earnings for Full-Time Employees in the UK 2022 – By Region, Statista (2023).





# Private Sector Best Practice from Across the Purpose Coalition



## University of Derby

COVID-19 fundamentally changed the context of university hardship funds. During the pandemic the Government provided the higher education sector with millions of pounds of additional funding to support students impacted by the pandemic – administered through its hardship schemes. As a result, all higher education institutions relaxed the criteria for, and evidence of, hardship to speed up the process.

Post-pandemic, some of the changes in the approach have remained in place due to the feedback of students, and in acknowledgement of the additional response needed towards a diverse and changing student body in light of the rises in the cost-of-living. The University of Derby has made the hardship fund easier to access with reduced paperwork – continuing to open it up to students who would have been traditionally exempt from hardship support.

The cost-of-living crisis is not one that is shared by all students equally. Students from, or in, a middle-income household are subject to the most acute impact as they do not meet the threshold for higher level support. Their parents and guardians are also in many cases unable to provide significant necessary sums of financial support. This is likely to impact more students at the University of Derby, with a higher number of non-traditional students. Many in this middle income bracket, and also perhaps mature students, are not within student halls – facing a further challenge of increased external heating costs.

The University has consistently seen a growing number of hardship applications in-line with the rises in the cost-of-living – with concern shared across the higher education sector. The University is seeing year on year an alarming number of students entering university with significant debt issues. For a large proportion of these students this requires interventions from specialist debt advice services.

In response, the University of Derby is providing a significant package of financial support for its students, including the University Bursary scheme, with awards of £1,000 to eligible students.

The ‘Derby Achievement Award’ also provides a further £1,000 for eligible students, and a voucher to support key university materials. Students can also receive up to £10,000 maintenance loan per academic year, and for those students on health-related courses there is a further £5,000 training grant and a £2,000 parents’ and carers’ allowance.

## Calisen

### Smarter Energy for All

As a leading owner and manager of essential energy infrastructure assets, Calisen sits at the heart of the UK energy ecosystem. Our mission to deliver ‘Smarter energy for all’ particularly through the roll-out of Smart Meters, is helping consumers reduce their energy consumption and costs, helping deliver a cleaner, more efficient and sustainable energy segment.

Enabling consumers to have greater visibility and control over their energy consumption is crucial in helping ameliorate the impact of rising energy prices, and inflation more broadly, that are contributing to the current cost-of-living challenge. Smart Meters put the consumer in control of their consumption in a greater way than has ever been possible before, with the information and data made available to consumers to inform their energy choices.

In addition to quantified benefits in delivering reduced energy consumption, with the concurrent positive financial and climate impact, the Smart Meter roll out has according to the UK Government been an important contributor to the national economy, supporting around 15,000 jobs across Great Britain with over 99% of the funding coming from the private sector and annual investment running at c.£1bn.

Smart Meters provide a more digitally enabled energy system, which in turn should result in faster data management and monitoring, heralding a number of developments:

- **Control:** UK Government research indicates a 2.8% electricity reduction and 2% gas reduction among Smart Meter owners. These savings are calculated on the basis of the installation of a Smart Meter alone. Consumers are provided with real time data through an in-house display unit accurately measuring the amount and cost of appliances in use. This allows consumers to identify appliances that are low value, high cost, and alternatively low cost, high value, providing real choice in pounds and pennies of their energy consumption.
- **Billing:** Smart Meters provide the opportunity for two-way communication between energy retailers and the meter itself. The introduction of Smart Meters into the domestic energy system is a step change in the way energy is provided to consumers, allowing customers to measure and effectively monitor their energy consumption. As we move to a more decentralised energy system, Smart Meters are believed to be a key

enabler of change as they allow for consumption measurements in near real time, permitting variable pricing mechanisms in order to manage demand, primarily in the electricity segment.

- **Time Management:** Energy used by households in most circumstances currently costs the same at all times of the day, and so there is no motivation for consumers to balance consumption across the day. A more digital energy system should allow consumers to target energy use in the lower-demand and less costly time of the day.
- **Supplier Management:** Increased billing accuracy through rapid data collection and transfer, with the potential for lower energy bills from improved grid management, a cheaper and simpler switching process, and improved pricing transparency to allow more informed decisions on switching to be made, allowing consumers to make more informed decisions on energy providers and competitive tariffs.
- **National Provisions:** Smart Meters also help energy network operators balance the grid by providing more information regarding energy consumption patterns. Using insights on energy usage, enables utility companies to develop various tariffs, including pricing incentives to encourage energy saving. In addition, this directly contributes to tackling the climate emergency, as it means energy suppliers can become far more efficient about how much energy they produce, as they understand more about when we will need it.

The overall impact of Smart Meters on consumers is summarised by increased billing accuracy through rapid data collection and transfer, providing the opportunity for lower energy bills, achieved by improved grid management, a cheaper and simpler switching process, and improved pricing transparency to allow more informed decisions on switching to be made.

In addition, the in-home digital data display unit allows consumers real information on appliance vs. energy usage, allowing for more informed consumer consumption and closer management of day-to-day usage resulting in lower energy bills. The overarching impact is that consumers have more knowledge, accurate data and billings creating opportunities for cost savings for consumers who are impacted by the cost-of-living crisis.

To date Calisen has installed over 8.6 million Smart gas meters and 11.4 million Smart electric meters, helping empower consumers and support them to make the best possible energy choices. Our roll out programme is accelerating once again following the disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic, and our recent acquisition of the smart metering installation business of Utility Warehouse, will help support the benefits of Smart Meters being brought to even more consumers in the months and years ahead.





## Co-op

Paying colleagues fairly for the work they do is central to the Co-op approach – the Co-op pays the real living wage to all its colleagues. It does not pay the ‘Under 23’ or ‘Apprenticeship’ rate, even though it employs more than 650 apprentices and 7 percent of Co-op colleagues are under 20. But purely focussing on pay isn’t enough, that’s why the Co-op has a longstanding programme to support the financial wellbeing of all its colleagues.

The Co-op’s focus on financial wellbeing predates both the cost-of-living crisis and the pandemic, although both have only served to highlight why now more than ever a purpose-led business has a responsibility to support the financial wellbeing of all colleagues.

Listening to colleagues has been central to the Co-op’s approach. Through regular engagement with colleagues – both formally and informally – the Co-op learned that colleagues in many communities were struggling. Many colleagues, particularly those in their 20s and 30s, were in debt – savings rates were falling to historic lows and in-work poverty was rising. It also became clear that for many colleagues, basic skills for money management were missing.

This has led to a package of support developed to address the needs of Co-op colleagues.

These include:

Wagestream – a financial resilience programme that includes a salary advance option, launched in 2021, allowing access to earned pay between paydays. The scheme was launched as the Co-op was aware that many colleagues struggled from payday to payday.





Wagestream helps to smooth their cash flow with an advance rather than having to borrow money. To date the scheme has been used by more than 13,000 colleagues, of which around 7,000 have reported they feel less stressed as a result and are in more control of their finances. Wagestream also offers an instant access savings account paying 5 percent interest – around 3,450 colleagues have opened one.

Credit Unions – the Co-op movement has close links to the Credit Union movement. Almost 5,600 colleagues are members of the two credit unions associated with the Co-op – Keep Credit Union and the Co-op Credit Union. Both are free to join, offering colleagues a better deal on saving or borrowing money. Regular payments are made into savings and loan repayments come straight out of colleagues' pay.

Regular communications and advice – a monthly 'Wellbeing Wednesday' email is sent to all colleagues with help and support on every aspect of health and wellbeing, including financial wellbeing.

In the last month the Co-op has also launched a survey targeted at all colleagues to find out what additional support they would value. This survey will be followed up with a 'deep dive', offering colleague focus groups who will be supported to set the strategy they want, rather than for one to be 'set' by the People team.

By taking this colleague-led approach the Co-op's ambition is to put in place an approach that is uniquely tailored to the needs of Co-op colleagues. The Chartered Institute of Personal Development (CIPD) reports that only 20 percent of employees say their employer has a financial wellbeing policy and the same proportion believe their employer isn't doing enough to support them. For workers in most need of support – those on low incomes – the figure is one in four.

Rental Deposit Scheme – colleagues can apply for an interest-free rent deposit loan to help with the cost of renting their home. An application can be made as soon as a tenancy agreement has been received up to a maximum of 80 percent of earnings over a 4-week period. Repayments are taken directly from salary over the next 10 paydays after the loan is received.



## Essex County Council

Essex County Council (ECC) acknowledges the myriad of issues the Cost of Living Crisis raises, as well as intensifying many of the challenges people were already facing. In the face of this immense threat to so many within its community, ECC has developed a strategy aimed specifically at the short-term issues affecting its communities right now, and the medium-term priorities which can secure the long-term resilience of the county by addressing the root cause of the problems.

This approach to tackling the rising cost of living is based around three underpinning pillars - Response, Resilience and Root Causes.

ECC understands that people are struggling right now. It is providing a short-term crisis response that can be delivered quickly and that will help people with the most pressing needs. Within this short term response pillar there are six key areas of activity:

**Essential living items:** Support with essential living items both through community activity and the Essential Living Fund working collaboratively. Funding totalling £8.687m has been allocated from the Department for Work and Pensions' Household Support Fund. £85,000 has also been allocated to support community winter resilience and hospital discharge.

**Keeping Warm:** ECC has been working with community organisations, providing targeted advice and support to those most at risk from living in a cold home. The council has also developed its 'Sustainable Warmth Programme' - investing over £17m through the South East Energy Hub to

support up to £10,000 of work per household to improve home energy efficiency. This will be targeted at homeowners with low energy efficient homes with a household income of below £30,000.

**Eating Well:** ECC has been supporting healthy and free meals for children from families on low incomes during school holidays and providing advice and education on cooking healthy meals. The council has also invested £500,000 to establish community supermarkets across Essex.

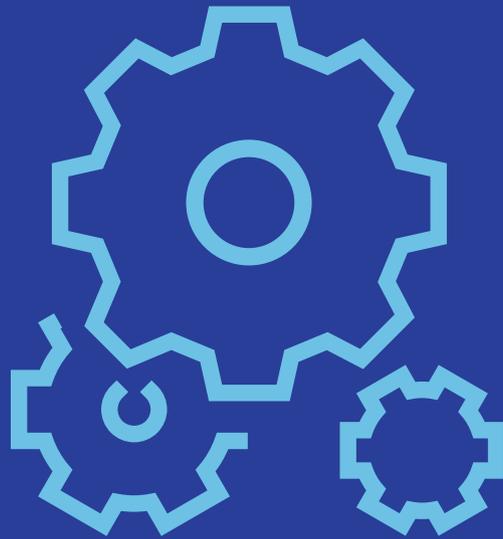
**Money management:** The council is developing money management tools and advice to support families to make their budgets go further. A new £7.9 million ‘Essex Multiply’ initiative will offer over 14,000 Essex residents easy access to free maths and finance training over the next 3 years. ECC is also piloting a programme of Financial Wellbeing coaches in a number of areas across the region to support 1,000 working families to manage their finances and increase their resilience to future challenges.

**Information advice and guidance:** Investing in additional capacity and resources to provide information to enable people to make informed decisions that can help to reduce their bills. ECC is planning to invest £120,000 in the Citizens Advice network in Essex this year to assist them in supporting residents with information and advice through the cost of living challenges. The council is also planning to partner with another Purpose Coalition member, UK Power Networks (UKPN) to increase registrations onto the The Priority Service Register.

Wellbeing: Working with communities, organisations and partners to improve the wellbeing and health of local people to build resilience and self-reliance. The Essex Wellbeing Service (EWS) supports residents across a range of wellbeing issues, including help with day to day needs. ECC is also the local authority in still being able to get around; providing free bus passes for disabled residents over 60, supporting car sharing schemes to and from work and establishing the Essex Pedal Power which is distributing free bicycles in various locations.

In the medium and longer term, ECC is striving to ensure that its residents and communities are – as far as possible – able to support themselves and withstand future financial and social pressures. This pillar, ‘Resilience’, is delivered through the council’s budget and service provision, aiming to support the independence that is necessary for its communities to flourish.

In order to ensure resilience for the Essex community, the council has recognised that future long-term prosperity is key to enabling people to live fulfilling lives. In acknowledgement that it is sometimes impossible to avoid the impacts of wider financial turmoil, ECC is committed to focusing on supporting businesses to drive economic growth and targeting strategic attention at levelling up communities, people and families which need the most support. This pillar, ‘Root Causes’, is delivered through ECC’s long-term political policies – set out in the ‘Everyone’s Essex’ programme.



## Leonardo

Leonardo employs 8,000 people across seven sites in the UK. For every 100 jobs within the company, it also supports 355 jobs across the country. It has a long tradition of supporting its employees, as well as its supply chain and its communities.

Leonardo believes that the best way to deliver financial stability and resilience for individuals and communities is by providing well-paid, skilled jobs that not only provide employment but also offer rewarding careers in a company where people want to continue to work. The average length of service in Leonardo is greater than 20 years. During the pandemic it did not lose, or furlough, any members of staff but quickly facilitated remote working where appropriate, or continued onsite working where needed, to ensure customer deliveries.

### Extending the talent pool

Leonardo firmly believes in equality of opportunity – a person's upbringing or background should not define the success of their future.

It acknowledges that those who do not have experience in their families or peer groups of working in the engineering or defence sector would not necessarily consider that the company is for them. It works hard to inform and educate those with talent of whatever background so they can access career opportunities through its STEM educational activities and its apprenticeship and graduate schemes.

The opportunities for underrepresented communities not only change individual career trajectories and life prospects but create much-needed role models within families and communities.

Leonardo recognises the value in wider and often overlooked talent pools, including those returning to the industry after a career break, particularly women and those from an ethnic minority background. Programmes across its UK sites give experienced professionals the chance to get back into full-time employment through training and upskilling on the job. This approach also ensures that Leonardo has access to a wider population for recruitment, engaging talent which may otherwise be lost to the sector.

Wider diversity in its workforce means a broader and more innovative perspective for the business. That makes good business sense, particularly in the context of the current skills gap across industry.

### **Retaining underrepresented groups**

Retaining staff is just as important for the business as attracting them in the first place. Leonardo is one of the UK's largest employers of engineering apprentices and graduates and invests about £3.5 million on employee training and development annually to retain their staff and their unique knowledge. As a result of the high tech employment it offers, the average salary at Leonardo is £51K, compared to a national average of £31k. Its approach obviously pays dividends as productivity within the company is 95K a head, 80% higher than the UK average of 57K.

## Pertemps

Pertemps, established in 1961, is the UK's largest privately owned recruitment solutions provider, consisting of more than 200 branches.

Its national infrastructure and access to subject matter experts from across the group, gives the organisation credibility across a broad spectrum of markets and this, coupled with a capacity to manage high volume, multi-site contracts, gives an unrivalled ability to manage change, growth and continuous improvement.

Pertemps sees the next six months as a period when it should expect to see significant movement and potential disruption as workers in the private and public sectors continue to push for salary increases to mitigate the significant rises in the cost of living.

There will be competitive tension between what happens in the public sector and expectations passed through to the commercial sector. It is, perhaps, the start of an avalanche of expectations.

What Pertemps does is give market comparisons and evidence the current market profiles for different roles, through its Meriden Media market insight team. This intelligence is used to advise clients on vacancies, current wages or salary levels, and to benchmark roles.

In this way, Pertemps can advise clients on where salaries are going currently, linked to the growing demands of cost of living hikes.

Due to the candidate short market employers are also forced to offer significantly higher pay rates/ salaries to attract new employees. It now seems like Gazumping is not just a real estate thing these days. Payzumping is now very real.

As a business, Pertemps represents multiple sectors, so it acts as a barometer for the different market sectors in the UK. It either has clients in these sectors, or directly place candidates into the sectors, so have a true feel for what is happening.



The jobs market is seeing very high demand in every local area across a variety of industries. While it's a very candidate-focused market, the abundance of adverts reflects the challenges firms are facing.

According to the Pertemps/CBI Labour Market Report in June 2022, there has been a further tightening of labour demand.

There were an estimated 1.3 million vacancies in the three months from March 2022 to May 2022. However, there are some early signs that the jobs market could be on the turn, with hiring slowing and unemployment edging up.

Pertemps is continuing to see an increase in the number of active postings, a trend which has continued throughout the year, albeit a slowdown in hiring activity from previous months, indicating that employers are having difficulty in finding the talent they need in a tight labour market.

In Pertemps' opinion, and through interaction with clients, it can see that, as low unemployment and the high demand for talent continues, especially in the private sector, it is creating a real tension that will cause salaries to continue to increase to address the demands of higher living costs.

Worker expectations will cause salary increases in an attempt to keep pace with inflation at a rate that has not been seen for years. There's going to come a time when expectation against affordability for businesses becomes critical.

While labour shortages are restricting firms' ability to hire and grow, it emphasises the need for cross-collaboration between recruiters and businesses to make sure they get hiring right in this challenging market.

Pertemps believes government backing is needed to help businesses support those not currently working to find a way back to the labour market, developing more innovative and data-driven ways of understanding skills demand and to reform the skills system to equip people for the future.



## Severn Trent

“I lost my job last year and I’ve struggled since claiming Universal Credit. The Big Difference Scheme has allowed me to pay my water charges on an affordable payment plan.”

This comment from a Severn Trent customer, who signed up to access a financial support fund in May 2022, is a common one. As the cost-of-living continues to rise, it’s estimated by the Consumer Council for Water (CCW) that 6.5% of households in the Midlands are being forced not only in to fuel poverty, but water poverty too. People in water poverty are those who spend more than 5% of their total income (after household costs) on their water bill.

Severn Trent doesn’t want any of its customers to worry about their water bill arriving and so recently made a commitment to support an additional 100,000 people through a £30 million package of financial assistance, to help households now, when they need it most.

The move was welcomed by regulator Ofwat, CCW and the CBI and is proving popular with people across the Midlands. More than 4000 applications were received in the first two months of the scheme launching, with 80% being successful and 13,000 clicks on the website a month – more than 400 a day – indicates the high level of interest in the additional support being made available.

Severn Trent is the first water company in the UK to offer help on this scale and builds on the support the company already provides to 215,000 customers, with an extensive range of schemes to help those in need. Those eligible could see a reduction in their bill of up to 90%.

“I was really struggling to pay my water charges before I applied for the Severn Trent Big Difference Scheme. I was over the moon when I received my new bill showing the discount.”



CCW's independent review of water affordability set out a clear path to ending people's worries over water bills and with the support of companies like Severn Trent and the wider water sector, together people struggling to pay can get the help they need, when they need it most.

The company provides support through The Big Difference Scheme and WaterSure, as well as a payment matching scheme, for those needing help with bills. Severn Trent encourages its customers to sign up to its Priority Services Register too, if they feel they would benefit from a more personalised service. The register helps identify customers with medical conditions, disability or restricted mobility, sight or hearing loss.

**David Black, Ofwat CEO commented:**

"No one should have to choose between paying for water and paying for food. We're pleased to see Severn Trent recognising the increased pressure facing customers and acting now to help those struggling in water poverty. Other companies should look to do more to respond to the cost-of-living worries and we will be issuing new guidelines to signal the increased expectations of Ofwat and the public."

Severn Trent is working hard to make sure that those customers who need support are aware of the help on offer, with a combination of targeted communications and partnership working. A great example of partnership working is a Care Leavers programme through which Severn Trent partners with six local authorities to offer financial support to young adults leaving the care system. This unique partnership allows care leavers to benefit from the Big Difference Scheme, offering a discount on water charges. A number of local authorities and registered social housing landlords also help identify and support those in need of financial support and engage with the local community through a team of outreach coordinators to promote awareness of affordability assistance. This fresh approach to support will see thousands of people lifted out of water poverty by automatically switching customers to one a support scheme.



**Leader of Birmingham City Council, Cllr Ian Ward added:**

“The cost-of-living crisis is hitting the people hard and they need help now, so this financial support package of measures is a very welcome move to cut water bills in a time of crisis. We’ve been in talks with Severn Trent to get help to those in greatest need and their help will make a huge difference to thousands of households currently struggling to make ends meet.”

Severn Trent customer support schemes include:

- The Big Difference Scheme can offer a reduction of water bills to any Severn Trent customer with a household income below £16,385 – this is the scheme that is being extended today to a further 100,000 people
- WaterSure is a scheme for Severn Trent customers that cap customer bills at the average yearly charge
- Priority Services Register is available to Severn Trent customers if they feel they would benefit from a more personalised service. The register helps identify customers with medical conditions, disability or restricted mobility, sight or hearing loss and those who would appreciate receiving their bills in a different format
- Severn Trent Trust Fund – Customers who are unable to meet the cost of water charges and who live in the Severn Trent area can apply for help directly and to organisations that work in the area of debt advice. To date, the fund has supported more than 627,500 customers

Severn Trent customers should visit

**[www.stwater.co.uk/caringforyou](http://www.stwater.co.uk/caringforyou)** for more information and to check eligibility.

## Reed in Partnership

Reed in Partnership delivers employment, skills and health services, working in some of the most deprived communities across the UK.

To respond to the rises in the cost-of-living situation, it has introduced a number of new products and initiatives into

our programmes:

- Staff have organised a series of cost-of-living events to offer information and advice to participants on what help is available and how they can budget effectively. Reed in Partnership has brought together local authorities, utility companies and organisations including Citizens Advice and Shelter to offer expertise and guidance.
- As an organisation, it is utilising expert local partners to upskill front-line Employment Advisers so they can adequately support and signpost participants needing help to the right local organisations.
- Reed in Partnership is also launching a cost-of-living toolkit, bringing together advice and information, which will be provided to our participants.

Finally, recognising that energy costs is the primary concern of participants Reed in Partnership has spent the past couple of months developing a new Energy Advice product.

Its Smart Energy Check will provide tailored and bespoke advice to participants on how they can reduce their energy bills by simple changes in their home, affordable tips on home insulation and, crucially, sources of financial advice and support. Reed in Partnership has trained its staff and began offering this service to participants in early September of last year.



## Staffordshire University

Staffordshire University, based in Stoke on Trent, is keenly aware that rising costs impact student communities. That's why in Summer 2022, the university convened a cost-of-living working group, alongside the Students' union, to develop practical solutions to support students.

### **The universities' working group agreed that action was needed on four key themes:**

**Support:** Providing direct help to students in need.

**Safety:** Providing safe spaces to access heating and other essential resources.

**Affordability:** Reducing costs to provide affordable options:

**Income:** Creating access to meaningful work opportunities.

Staffordshire University's 'acting on cost' programme is being rolled out in three phases. The first two phases are focused on low-cost solutions that act on cost. This includes increased provision of money management workshops, action on hygiene poverty, free breakfast from the Students' Union, as well as subsidised clubs and society access.

In phase three, the university has committed an additional £500,000 to support students as part of Staffordshire Action on Cost. Most of this funding will be used to provide direct financial support to students in need, and will provide subsidised food options at catering outlets; offer meaningful work placements to more students; and support students who are experiencing digital poverty.

The University is also undertaking many other key additional activities:

### **Staffordshire Outcakes**

Staffordshire University are working with catering outlets to provide subsidised Staffordshire Outcakes for staff and students, who can purchase a hot meal at a reduced rate, and those that are able can donate funds to pay forward for others.

### **Earning and learning**

The university provides paid meaningful work experiences to students, whatever their level of study, and in 2023, Staffordshire University will extend its paid work placement provision to allow more Level 5 students than ever before the opportunity to access part time paid work experience to deliver further financial sustainability and autonomy for our learners.

### **Discover Digital**

Staffordshire University prides itself on being a 'Connected University', and is working with civil mission partners to combat digital poverty. The university has received funding from Discover Digital to provide laptops to Level 4 students who demonstrate need.

Discover Digital is a Stoke-on-Trent Community Renewal Funded project, designed to boost digital inclusion in the city by identifying, understanding and breaking down barriers to digital access. Discover Digital has provided innovative and meaningful digital support and training to some of the most digitally excluded members of our community, as well as issuing grants for laptops and devices for those facing financial barriers to digital access. The project opened a pop-up shop in the city centre and delivered bespoke digital training and support in community venues across Stoke-on-Trent to reach people who were most digitally excluded, and involved 154 people in a city wide community consultation to define and address the barriers to digital access.

As of the end of October 2022, 254 individuals received digital skills support through the scheme, while 188 individuals and 14 community organisations grants have been provided with equipment totalling £142,000 through the programme's Get Connected and Innovation grants. Discover is now helping 28 Staffordshire University students with grants for devices to help improve their digital access, as well as a package of support to enhance their digital and employability skills. We are matching funding from Staffordshire University's Discover Digital scheme to improve digital accessibility for our students. This may include improving access to hardware or prepaid wifi dongles, for example.

## University of Southampton

The University of Southampton places its egalitarian values at the heart of its work, and has long committed significant resources to supporting students in financial difficulty during their studies.

With over 25,000 students, and more than 5,000 staff, the university is strongly linked to the city as part of a broad community, and through research output, and civic focused activities, aims to offer community-wide initiatives which support the whole community as costs rise.

Students studying at Southampton come from diverse backgrounds. Whilst some come from families or background more able to weather the impact of rising costs, many look to the university as a lifeline during these times of uncertainty. Taking a whole-institution approach, members of the university Senior Leadership Team, academics, Student Support, and the Students' Union are working together to implement interventions at pace, and have been able to support communities over the academic year.

### **Increasing Financial Support**

The University of Southampton's Student Support Fund is a central hardship fund which is available for students - whatever their level of study - and can offer non-repayable grants of up to £3,500 in each academic year. For 2022/23, the university has almost doubled the funding available, and since the beginning of the academic year, has awarded more than £400,000 to students in the most need. Working with their finance teams, the university has moved to an online payment system, meaning students can receive funding quickly, and directly into their bank accounts, and to manage demand, the university is growing its team of Financial Support Coordinators to process application quickly, and give students financial piece of mind to focus on their studies.

The University of Southampton has created two distinct funds, the Technology Grant, which provides funding for hardware, software, internet access and other essential equipment to ensure students can engage effectively with their studies. The university's Health and Wellbeing Fund provides funding to access essential items, such as glasses, cost towards dental or other medical treatment, prescription costs, and



access to bespoke therapy services. Funding is targeted at those from the most disadvantaged parts of the United Kingdom, students from low-income households, and those juggling caring responsibilities whilst studying.

### **Food for All**

In November 2022, the university launched its Food for All Programme, a free food larder on campus delivered by the Students Union and subsidised by the University. Students can collect items from the dry store as needed or be referred for a full food parcel, as well as accessing supermarket vouchers to act as a stop gap whilst waiting for additional funding.

The university also offers free, or heavily subsidised food from its Students Union, and University-run food outlets. This includes free breakfast and lunch, as well as subsidised cooked meals on campus, aswell as partnering with Too Good to Go, to offer significantly discounted foods from all catering outlets on the campus.

### **Events, Activities and Extracurricular**

University is about more than what you learn on your programme, it is also the experiences that shape and develop you during your studies. Recognising that rising costs will make some students less likely take on additional opportunities, the university has created a series of free, fun events which allow students to mix with their peers, learn new skills and relax. The University of Southampton's Student Engagement Team now run events every day across its sites, offering arts and craft sessions, sports and activities, quizzes, and events. In order to ensure students don't miss out on opportunities, the university also offers a Summer Enrichment Fund, in partnership with Santander. Students can use the funding of up to £750 to undertake a wide-range of activities, both national and international. Programmes have included an internship in Brussels with a charity focused on eradicating homelessness; attending an academic conference; learning sign language, and work on a palaeontology dig on the Isle of Wight. The scheme will be available for students to apply from January 2023.

### **Prioritising Financial Wellbeing**

Whilst offering financial support is impactful it is also important for us to support students to develop positive relationships with money and harness those skills to make the most of the funding they receive. In January 2023 we will be launching our Money Mentors programme which is a peer-led Financial Wellbeing initiative. This project aims to remove some of the stigma from taking about money and asking for help when you need by opening the conversation across the university. The Students Union's Wellbeing Wednesday's offer students' chance to have a cup of tea and catch up with experts on questions and concerns about their finances. They can offer budgeting information, support and debt advice as required as well as an opportunity to access available funding.

### **Civic Responsibility**

As part of Southampton's Civic Strategy, the university is working with its long-term collaborative partner, IntoUniversity, to trial the introduction of winter snacks at its Redbridge Centre. This will mean that young people who attend the after school provision are offered a healthy snack and drink. The trial aims to create a template that the charity can then extend across all its sites. Through a two-way dialogue with student mentors who volunteer at the site, the university is exploring ways to ensure that volunteers are being supported with their cost-of-living through thank you vouchers, so volunteers can maintain their commitment to the schemes.



## Loughborough University

Loughborough University is placing its values at the heart of its response to the rising cost-of-living, increasing and expanding hardship fund arrangements, and making them available to all students, including international students.

### **Low-cost breakfasts**

The University is offering all students, including those living off campus, and staff, with cheaper breakfast alternatives throughout the week. Including a hot breakfast, and selection of free cereals, fresh fruit, and coffee for £1.

### **Hardship funds**

The university has also increased and expanded hardship fund arrangements, which are available to all students. Students struggling with money can get in touch with the university's Student Advice and Support Service, which can help with money advice, access to hardship funds, and other support, alongside impartial advice about managing other costs of living.

### **Entering the world of work**

The university is also helping students who need to fund work, pulling together part-time work opportunities into a single place. The university is also assisting students to find part-time opportunities, prepare effective CVs, as well as offering interview advice and practice.

### **Digital poverty**

Whilst Loughborough University has free to use IT labs across its campus, with over 2,000 machines available, the university is also providing students with an urgent, short-term need for a laptop with alternatives, and all students can also download a free copy of Microsoft Office 365 as part of the University's licence.

## University of Chester

The University of Chester recognises how the cost-of-living crisis might affect its student community, and has put a combined package of direct support and investment together that can support students who may be struggling with the cost-of-living, and where rising costs may impact students' affordability to take part in opportunities that will enhance studies and prospects.

The University of Chester's combined package of direct support and investment totals nearly £2,000,000, with a cross-university taskforce, in collaboration with Chester Student Union, and Chaired by the Pro Vice-Chancellor for Student Experience, meeting to ensure measures are in place to support students, and put resources behind a range of measures and interventions. From free hot drinks and subsidised meals, to free social and fitness activities with direct funding, the University of Chester is ensuring its students are supported as part of a safe university community.

### Direct Financial Support

- The university is providing up to £3,500 through application to the Financial Support Fund, including discretionary funds to cover unexpected hardship such as equipment repairs or emergency travel. International students can access up to £3,500 through application to the dedicated International Financial Emergency Fund.
- Students have access to a Digital Inclusion Fund, which supports students to make sure they have the right tools to help them at university. This can include repairs, devices and accessories. Awards are made either as a financial payment, or a new device can be provided.
- Household income means-tested bursaries for students with extra bursaries available for those from under-represented backgrounds such as care experienced students or students from Gypsy, Roma, Traveller, Showman, Boater communities.
- Students at the University of Chester can access up to £500 to fund specialist equipment and professional development opportunities to aid students career aspirations.
- Students can access up to £500 to fund attendance, travel and accommodation for network enhancing opportunities such as conferences, to build and develop student's social capital.
- Increasing the number of on-campus job opportunities for students. Before recruiting externally, departments are asked "Can you employ a student to do this role?".
- Delayed funding loans; repayable short-term interest free loans that are offered to students experiencing a delay in funding.



### **Financial Advice and Guidance**

- The University of Chester has invested in BlackBullion, a financial wellbeing platform that equips young people with money skills for life and improves access to funds.
- The university invested in a dedicated external student assistance program that offers, amongst other services, support and guidance with financial wellbeing.
- Access to a new dedicated, and directly employed, money advisor based within Student Services.

### **How life on campus is adapting to the rising cost-of-living?**

- The University of Chester Students Union is making use of warm buildings to host free to attend social events such as cinema nights.
- On-campus retail outlets stock value ranges of commonly used foodstuffs.
- Students are issued free reusable water bottles with free water outlets across the university estate.
- The university has established a “too good to throw” scheme, alongside a community fridge within a sustainability shop, where minimal amounts of staple cooking ingredients can be purchased at very low costs.
- The university makes provision for prepared hot food, available free of charge after core catering hours.
- Students can collect a free community tea or coffee from any of the university’s catering outlets, alongside complimentary slices of toast between 8:30 and 11am. In addition, the University of Chester makes essential meal deals available every day for £1.99, alongside homemade soup for 50p.

### **Health and Wellbeing**

- The University of Chester has made Fitness Classes throughout its fitness centre free of charge to all students, with no gym membership required. In addition, shower facilities are open use at all available times to all students.
- The university has made available low-cost gym membership with a new, lower, discreet low-income membership option.
- Students who represent the university in sports no pay nothing for their kit, and is fully funded by the university.

The University of Chester is expanding its free products scheme across the university, and has established a free-to-use counselling service through both student services, and an external assistance programme. The University of Chester has a committed and dedicated student services team, with colleagues standing in to support students in whatever way they need. The university remains committed to ensuring students, regardless of their background, can succeed at university, and go on to fulfilling, professional lives.



## York St John University

York St John University, situated in the heart of the City of York, is underpinned by principles of social justice, which drives its behaviour, projects and approaches. The university aims to embed these values into its day-to-day work, standing up against inequality. As a university driven by this commitment to social justice, York St John believes that tailored support for students during the cost-of-living crisis is its obligation.

Against a backdrop of high inflation and a looming, long-term economic recession, students are facing a tangible and severe impact on their day-to-day life and long-term economic prospects. Many students already work to supplement their finances. In late summer 2022 the York St John Executive Board approved a range of targeted initiatives to support students through the cost-of-living crisis.

These initiatives built on actions the University had already taken, including freezing accommodation fees for the year, providing subsidies for students in third party student accommodation, and to permanently remove payments for assessment resits, printing and library fines.

Working with students, staff and the unions that represent them, York St John University has defined, implemented and developed several measures to help ease the cost-of-living for students. A £750,000 investment has enabled the university to create a new student foodbank, make more financial support available to students in the greatest need, provide high-quality low-cost catering on campus, and remove barriers to engagement in sports and societies through heavily subsidised fees.

### **A student food bank (the “YSJ Larder”)**

Basic food costs are becoming unaffordable for many students and continue to rise. Many goods, seen to be ‘student basics’ such as milk, eggs, vegetable oil, pasta and bread, have seen the biggest price hikes.



In recognition of this fundamental need to access economically priced food, the university has substantially extended its 'YSJ Larder' – providing a campus-based food bank that students can access without embarrassment or stigma. The Larder is stocked with a wide range of basic stocks including non-perishable foods, toiletries, household products and stationery. York St John University is also providing vouchers for local supermarkets, so that students can access fresh items. In addition to promoting the Larder, the university has increased the hours of operation to enable more students to easily access the items free of charge. An equivalent to the YSJ Larder is also being launched at the university's London campus.

York St John University is also addressing period poverty, a big issue for students. The university recognises how uncomfortable it can be for people to ask for sanitary products, and to tackle this, has sourced ethical sanitary products which are now freely available in bathrooms around campus for students and staff to take when they need them.

### **Increased Student Support Fund**

In acknowledgement of additional pressures students are facing due to the rising costs of goods, services and expenditure, the university has trebled its investment in Student Support hardship fund. This fund enables students in acute financial need to quickly access additional money to help in times of difficulty. The university has also reviewed and lowered thresholds for accessing funds, owing to the rise in inflation. All students across the university have access to the hardship fund, regardless of their level or location of study.

### **Subsidised on-site catering**

Providing low-cost catering on campus is an effective way to reduce student living expenses. Alongside the Larder, York St John University provides access to cheap, nutritious cooked meals. The University has subsidised the costs, so tea and coffee costs £1, a hot breakfast is £2, and a hot lunch is £3, with soft drinks for 50p. This initiative is also available to staff and those in the wider community who use the on-site catering.



**Subsidised sports, societies and membership costs**

In the 2022/23 academic year, fees to join sports and societies have been heavily subsidised by the University, with a 50% discount for students who are member of any sport club, and an upper cap of £5 to join any society. The university has also covered the cost of sport kits for students, designed to further reduce the barriers to access extracurricular activities, which offer important benefits to students' physical health and mental wellbeing. Costs to fund other memberships, voluntary placement costs and other one-off costs associated with courses are now also covered by the University. These activities positively impact students' progression into jobs after university and are key to support.

**Non-financial support**

York St John's commitment to social justice in its day-to-day work also means that cost-of-living support measures are considered alongside a suite of non-financial support. This includes: campaigns, advice and guidance on budgeting and saving; money saving events on campus; providing heated spaces on campus (and extended open hours); and, working with partners in the city to approach businesses and travel companies to offer student discounts.

**Additional support for staff**

York St John University has also not forgotten that university staff are also affected by cost-of-living challenges. In addition to paying the Voluntary Living Wage, York St John University has made a £700 winter payment to all staff below senior leadership level. Paid over 3 months, the payment is designed to assist with increased bills at a time when staff most need financial support. In 2023, alongside plans to improve the university pay structure by adjusting grade boundaries, York St John is developing proposals to further enhance its employment offer.



## UWE Bristol

UWE Bristol is a people organisation; the university believes that it is its people that create the ideas and innovation that make the university such an inspiring place to be. Therefore, when the university faces challenges, the whole university faces them together.

The cost-of-living crisis is one such challenge, with potentially damaging consequences for inequality, increasing barriers to opportunity and creating real difficulties to the everyday lives of our staff and students.

UWE Bristol is committed to doing they can to help the university community, whilst recognising that the higher education sector as a whole is also experiencing the impact of the challenging financial situation and rising energy bills.

The university is proud to offer students access to additional financial support while they study, where they are experiencing financial difficulty. Whether that be the university's Student Support Fund, to help UK students remain in education, bursary schemes, targeted loan support for those on placement, a waiver policy for those experiencing exceptional financial circumstances, or EU/International emergency fund – financial support is available to those who need it and promoted through the university's website and internal communications. This term, the university has seen a 15% increase in applications for the scheme, compared to this time last year, with the average award being £300 higher than last year.

All UWE Bristol students (prospective, current and graduates), as well as staff, also have free access to Blackbullion financial education resources. Blackbullion is an online platform where students can learn about personal finance at their own leisure through animated videos, quizzes and tools such as budgeting and loan repayment calculators. In addition, budgeting workshops are being run through our Student Money Service, with the UWE Students' Union and the Global Centre, to help support students.

These schemes are in addition to a range of existing financial benefits for staff, being a Real Living Wage employer and ensuring our staff and students are aware of the full range of support available. The university has also had a big drive on employment opportunities for students within the university, with jobs for students always available.

The university is also working closely with UWE Students Union, to implement a number of initiatives which benefit both students and staff. These include free hot drink, bring your own bowl meals (with 5,000 meals



already provided across UWE's three campuses), free sanitary products, a free bike loans scheme, and clothing swap shops. The university is also opening up some of its buildings for longer, to provide warm spaces, alongside offering a discounted, eat well for less; special in our main catering outlets.

All of these initiatives are proving popular with our students and staff, with emergency food boxes also available for students in need.

UWE Bristol is also providing free tea and coffee at its main catering outlets, and have opened up shower facilities to all students and staff to use. The university is also freezing food sale prices in catering outlets and continue to offer free UWE Sport MOVE Programme for all students.

University leadership sees the MOVE programme as a critical part of supporting the health and wellbeing of students, the cost of sport should not be a barrier to participation. MOVE offers over 70 free weekly sessions designed to get students involved in activities that help them feel good and be active, including netball, football, yoga, aerial hoop and lots more. Students can try something new, take time to relax and meet lots of new people.

The university's approach also extends beyond the immediate University community, for example, a Green Skills for Jobs and Entrepreneurship programme, to provide access to green jobs, training and business opportunities for Black, Asian and minoritised young people and recent graduates in the region. The project, funded by the UK's Community Renewal Fund, as managed by the West of England Combined Authority, has provided learners with access to eight days of paid training – covering energy, food, living and the circular economy, transport and air quality, construction and building, innovation and enterprise. This 'first of kind' programme is just one example of how the University is working to maximise the talent of the region, widening opportunity and empowering individuals who would not otherwise be able to access this type of support.

The potential impact of the cost-of-living crisis on mental health and wellbeing, following on from the challenges of the pandemic, should not be understated. As a university, UWE Bristol has increased promotion of the mental health and wellbeing support that is available through the University for our staff and students, and the university recognises the difficult impact that these challenges can have. As a university, aims to look out for each other, and navigate these difficult times together. Our university transforms futures, this starts with our university community and creating solutions that support us all to thrive and flourish together.



## University of Stirling

The University of Stirling is focused on delivering for its students in the midst of the acute rises in the cost-of-living.

The University has a joint mental health strategy with its Student Union which sets out the actions it will jointly take to safeguard and enhance the mental health and wellbeing of students. A section of this strategy focuses on support; this refers to holistic support, not just specialist mental health support.

The University of Stirling recognised that financial insecurity and hardship is a major exacerbator of stress and mental ill health and, as such, the University continues to provide hardship funds over and above the SAAS Discretionary Funds, and it has recently invested in further increases in its support team - including the Student Money Team, Mental Health Team, Student Advice Team and the Student Hub team - to ensure that students receive the support they need as quickly as possible.

The strategy is overseen by a University wide Health and Wellbeing Group, chaired by the Dean of EDI and Director of Student Services, and the Student Union is well represented.

On food poverty, the University of Stirling is taking deliberate measures to mitigate the impact on students. Its Green and Blue environmental space runs a range of sustainable initiatives including recycle and reuse, a community garden and an orchard. Run by the Students' Union, the space also holds weekly clinics for clothes mending and regular creative and bike fixing workshops and also offers tools and advice to help students save energy and water.

Discussions are also underway to scope an initiative with local partners to limit food waste and ensure food that would be wasted is repurposed for those in need.

Free period products are provided throughout the campus and online. During Covid, the university introduced a system to ensure international students and those studying remotely were able to access



products and have also worked in partnership with local partners with a high student footfall, including MacRobert Arts Centre and a local GP practice to ensure that period products are free of charge to members of our community including students.

University of Stirling Student Support and Accommodation Services staff are also currently exploring utilising a catering facility in university residences to deliver affordable and healthy eating initiatives. Free hot water is also available on campus and there is access to tea and coffee making facilities in the Chaplaincy and Wellbeing spaces.

For the academic costs of students, academic reading lists are available online in advance, and the percentage of stock online increases year on year. The University has also removed any requirements for assignments to be submitted on paper, significantly reducing print costs.

The University of Stirling ceased issuing university-imposed fines for disciplinary offences for some time; the overall approach is now formally under review. Library fines are also capped at a nominal amount, and for some time students have not been prevented from graduating if they have any debt outstanding.

Placement travel costs are included when calculating eligibility for hardship funds. Discussions are now ongoing about expanding the short term loan scheme to cover these costs on a loan basis up front.

On fuel poverty, the University of Stirling is taking strategic action for its students. It has recently opened Campus Central, a new three-storey building, adding 3000 square metres, more than doubling the central space. This now includes a significant increase in seating spaces which are available 24-7 to students. The university also has a range of social and communal spaces on campus, including the Chaplaincy, Library, Library Wellbeing Space, a brand-new Wellbeing Space in the Cottrell Building, and a range of communal social spaces in all of its residential buildings. The Students' Union also offers a range of social and communal spaces open all day to students, including Studio, Underground and Venue. Energy bills are included in the cost of university accommodation to mitigate the impacts of sharp rises in energy prices.

For students struggling financially, the University offers a range of support mechanisms. The Careers and Employability Service (CES) advertises all suitable opportunities on campus to students. There are many examples of students working across the University. In addition, a range of academic departments work with CES to provide a range of paid internships across the university to students.

The University also provides short term loans to students who are in immediate financial crisis and strongly discourages any students from accessing pay day or high interest loans. Its Money Team provides guidance on this to students when providing short term loans or discretionary funding, and provides further guidance on the dedicated Student Money website.

The University runs an Accommodation Enhancement Fund for students who are enrolled on a full-time course. The maximum awards for this fund are:

- £1,200 for undergraduates
- £1,350 for nursing students
- £1,500 for postgraduates, estranged students, and students with experience of care

In addition, rental levels for University accommodation have been held below inflationary increases.

The University also provides specific grants and bursaries to particular groups - for example, registered care experienced students - who are guaranteed to receive at least £500 bursary even if no financial deficit is found. Students with care experience are also guaranteed to receive a £150 graduation bursary in their final year of studies to cover graduation costs.



## University of Northampton

In September 2022 the University of Northampton (UON) cost-of-living Taskforce was formed to respond to the cost-of-living crisis and support students, staff and the local community during this time of increased stress and financial pressure.

Personal reflections highlighted that, whilst university age dependents of staff were looking forward to starting or returning to their University experience, they were also dreading trying to make ends meet given the rise in cost-of-living.

Further analysis showed that 60 percent of UON students surveyed said they were most concerned with being able to pay for basic necessities. Concerningly, 51 percent of students admitted that worries about budgeting or having enough money for basic needs was having a significant impact on their wellbeing with 92 percent of prospective students surveying raised concerns about the rising cost-of-living, leaving them feeling anxious or stressed, and questioning whether they can afford to go to university.

The University of Northampton has responded to this crisis by forming a task force, uniting colleagues, Students Union and Trade Union Representatives, and the University Leadership Team in a common purpose to help the community through this challenging period.

The University of Northampton is the UK's first accredited Changemaker Campus by Ashoka U. Changemaker Campus is an Ashoka designation that recognises colleges and universities with a proven track record of campus-wide excellence for social innovation and changemaking.

These institutions collaborate with each other and Ashoka to advance social innovation and changemaking across higher education to graduate millions of changemakers. Selection criteria includes a commitment to embedding changemaking across the academics and the institution itself.



While they differ in terms of size, institutional type, geographic location, religious affiliation, and age, they are global leaders in social innovation and changemaking in higher education and share similar visions of what education and universities can be.

The University of Northampton has consistently demonstrated it can develop positive social impact throughout society. Especially in times of adversity, the University has displayed even further commitment to the programme through the wide reaching suggestions of support and offers of multi-disciplinary skills and resources.

During the first wave, over 200 suggestions of assistance were received, and were broadly categorised into workstreams focusing on academic costs, food and living support, on campus facilities, financial education and support, health and wellbeing, housing support, international student support, jobs and financial support, social experience, sustainability and travel.

Initiatives range from strategic reactive measures that prevent hunger and create warmth, to resilience-based proactive measures that address barriers to entering higher education, such as the 2.3 percent increase to the student maintenance loan, despite inflation rising to over 10 percent.

Workstreams have defined a clear suite of deliverables, with appropriately linked key performance indicators, designed to allow social impact measurement as time progresses.

Examples include a cost-of-living knowledge bank for the University community, a free health, wellbeing and physical activity offer, a freeze to the inflationary increase normally applied to student accommodation, financial support for students in financial crisis and a bespoke travel cost bursary aimed at students with dependants.

Working with localised partners, the Taskforce response also extends a wide-ranging package of food support to the Northampton community; this includes free breakfasts, discounted meals and community kitchens, ensuring no-one in the University community goes hungry, whilst connecting students with community groups to enable communities to support each other through the cost-of-living crisis.



UON believes the cost-of-living crisis should not be confused with living through it. Providing the fundamentals of warmth and sustenance is not enough to ward against the negative mental health impact of the crisis. The University strongly believes such support must be matched with opportunities for communities to socialise, collaborate and entertain. The lives of UON's community are enriched through a free, and low-cost, programme of social activities and volunteering opportunities that make the difference between surviving and thriving.

The Changemaker Hub is unique to UON, with specialist teams providing students, staff, and the local community the support needed to fulfil their ambitions, and to help other communities through this crisis. This includes support to spark a global movement, raising awareness of social injustice, starting a social enterprise or business, developing employability skills, or expanding an existing business – equipping the community of Northampton with the tools to navigate the current storm, and leaving them with the skills to flourish and build further resilience as the crisis subsides.

Finally, recognising the University's role as an anchor institution in the town, there was very much a focus on the support that UON can provide to the community of Northampton, with partnerships formed to input meaningfully into the local Anti-Poverty strategy, ensuring the specific needs of students and staff were appropriately reflected in local policy.

The University continues to offer emergency sleeping accommodation for the rough-sleeping community of Northampton throughout the winter period, affirming its commitment to a project started in collaboration with the local authority during the pandemic, designed to support the most vulnerable in society.







## SMS

SMS is committed and proud to be an accredited 'Living Wage' and 'Living Hours' employer. As an organisation, it has displayed its awareness and commitment to acting in response to the continued inflationary pressures wider society and its colleagues in particular face at this time.

In late 2022, SMS worked to ensure its employees were continually supported from both a wellbeing and financial perspective.

In order to support employees with the pressures of rising costs, SMS made a one-off, discretionary payment to those employees that sit in specific lower-end pay levels in its internal 'Pay and Reward' structure, within the November 2022 pay packet. SMS acknowledges that employees within these career levels are those most affected by the increased cost-of-living.

SMS has also rewarded all entry level employees with the 'Living Wage' and ensure that they are provided with the following terms and conditions;

- At least 4 weeks' notice period for shifts;
- A contract that reflects the hours they regularly work;
- A guaranteed minimum of 16 hours per week, unless an employee requests fewer.





As a Real Living Wage employer, SMS is committed to ensuring it pays the Living Wage as a minimum to employees, and as early as April 2022 the organisation took steps to ensure its employees were adequately prepared for the oncoming financial hardship. In May of this year, the Living Wage will increase nationally to £10.90 per hour. SMS displayed its commitment to its colleague offering, increasing its entry-level hourly rate to the same level, as of 1st November 2022.

SMS hopes that implementing the increase six months early will show its commitment to supporting employees on entry-level salaries during this challenging time.

This will continue to be a focus for SMS throughout 2023, as the company aims to ensure that any decisions made are in the best interests of its colleagues. This demonstrates SMS' commitment, not only to its employees, but to the wider economy.



## Northumbria University

Northumbria University is a large university of more than 30,000 students with campuses in Newcastle upon Tyne, London and Amsterdam, recently named University of the Year 2022 by Times Higher Education. Northumbria University is proud to be a research intensive, modern university and a driver of social mobility, particularly in the North East of England. The university is committed to raising educational aspirations, and recruiting high quality students regardless of background. 40% of our undergraduates are from areas of low participation in higher education.

The university recognised early in 2022 there was a need to do more to support students with the challenges faced as a result of the cost-of-living crisis. In response, a task and finish group with cross-university and Students' Union membership was set up to develop and implement a wide range of additional support for students in the 2022/23 academic year. This led to a Student Cost-of-Living Support Plan, which includes;

### **Information Communication and Signposting**

Recognising new and continuing students and their families may feel anxious around the cost of university study, a pre and post enrolment communications plan was developed by the university to ensure students understand the financial and wider wellbeing support offer provided by the University, and importantly how to access it. These communications are scheduled across the year to remind and reinforce our offer. Face to face sessions were also delivered as part of our welcome week activities for new and returning students. Offering a one stop shop for information, a Student Portal was also reconfigured to ensure all guidance related to cost-of-living, financial planning, financial and wider welfare and wellbeing support can be accessed in a single location. This is being promoted as part of a student and staff communications campaign. In addition the university held a focussed "Money Matters" month in October to highlight its support offer, a campaign which will be repeated in February.

### **Financial Capability and Resilience for students**

The University has invested in Blackbullion, an online financial resilience tool for students. This was rolled out over the first six weeks of the semester, and through "Money Matters" events. To incentivise engagement in Blackbullion, the university offered all student sign ups food credit on our Food to Go app. To date, 1,700 students across Northumbria's campuses are engaging in the Blackbullion platform –



the highest engagement of any UK university using the platform. The university is confident this will grow with the launch of tailored workshops and drop-ins commencing in December 2022. In early December, the university is also launching a 'Fill Your Fridge' Campaign to help students stock their fridges for the holidays while giving them insights about debt and managing finances.

The university is also contacting all new students via our Telecentre to understand how they are feeling and whether they require any welfare or wider support. This is then followed up by our specialist Student Support Teams. By late November almost 4000 students had been contacted via our Telecentre. From those contacted, 217 noted money and finance concerns. Information and support was made available to those students with 50 referrals subsequently made into our specialist support teams.

### **Financial and Wider Support**

Eligibility for the University's existing hardship support fund has been reviewed in light of cost-of-living data and the University has made significant additional funds available. Our digital poverty fund has also been given additional funding and we continue to provide travel support, including the purchase of travel cards for students who are required to undertake external placements as part of their degree. Students facing food poverty can access the Northumbria Student Union Foodbank or be allocated food vouchers which can be redeemed at supermarket chains.

We additionally provide financial support to Northumbria Students' Union to fund female hygiene products for students, and we are seeking further ways to support the provision of personal hygiene products. University funding has been made available to our Students' Union to provide a free daily breakfast club, providing free basic breakfast items five days a week to all students who wish to use this service.

As of November 25th 2022 we have received an additional 316 hardship applications, against 176 applications at this time last academic year. The average award to students is £2,296. In addition, we have also supported 219 students through our NU Belong programme which supports students who are carers, care leavers, estranged or sanctuary scholars. Almost £600,000 has been distributed so far this academic year in hardship support. Hampers will also be distributed to all students staying in university accommodation over the Christmas break.



### **Campus Environment**

We launched our “Be Part of It” campaign – an events plan offering a range of free or low-cost social activities across our campuses. Some examples of relevant activities include cooking clubs through our ‘Social Kitchen’ programme to educate students in healthy, low-cost cooking, in a social environment.

Key messaging in all buildings, via QR codes also promotes our 24/7 access to the campus environment and facilities including charging points, hot water and kitchen facilities.

We are also promoting low-cost gym membership at Sports Central on campus and low cost food options via the Students’ Union and campus catering outlets. Northumbria was the first University to sign up to the “Too Good to Go” app – we are actively promoting this service providing students with access to hot and cold food boxes every afternoon on a first come, first served basis. We know that in the last 12 months, Northumbria’s food has been accessed over 1,100 times via this app.

### **Education Delivery**

We have ensured that all our academic colleagues are aware of the range of student financial and wellbeing support available and how and when to refer students. We have also removed the requirement for students to purchase mandatory course texts and instead are directing them to on-line or on campus library resources and have ensured the Library is additionally resourced to cover this. Reducing the need for specialist learning materials such as lab and site equipment and clothing is also being considered with an opportunity for a bank of recycled items available for students.

Recognising students may need to prioritise part-time working in December and January when there are more seasonal employment opportunities in the city, we have factored this into the criteria for issuing coursework extensions and created a streamlined approach to assessment extension requests.

### **Employment Support**

We know that many of our students are facing further pressure to secure part-time employment and in order to help we held a campaign to raise awareness of our Part-time Jobs Fair and JobsOnline. The Part-time Jobs Fair was attended by 37 organisations offering paid opportunities in a broad range of sectors including health and social care, education, catering, hospitality and retail, administration, call centres and sport and leisure, in Newcastle or the region. It was attended by over 1,700 students and 94% of the students who completed feedback after the event said that as a result of attending they will apply for a job.

In addition funding was provided by the University as part of the NU: Opportunities initiative for paid placements and internship opportunities on campus in a wide variety of academic departments and service teams. By the end of November 2022, 132 students had been appointed into 100 hour, paid, internships – across a wide variety of roles – with further rounds of internship opportunities to be provided throughout the remainder of the academic year.

### **Alumni Support**

Furthermore, our successful Alumni Engagement Campaign “Higher Education Without Barriers” has raised £1.4m to date to support financial initiatives, mental health and wellbeing services and community-based projects to make participation and progression in higher education more achievable for academically talented students regardless of their social or economic circumstances. The focus of this campaign in winter 2022 is on student cost-of-living, with all donations received being used for student hardship and wellbeing.

### **Cross Region Approach**

We are also working with other regional universities, city partners and transport providers to progress collectively discussions on securing student discounts.



## The University of Greenwich

Over half of University of Greenwich students come from the most deprived areas in the UK and the rising cost-of-living is particularly challenging for them.

The University of Greenwich is taking steps to help, working closely with Greenwich Students' Union (GSU) to ensure the university is providing the support students need, when they need it most.

As well as having a number of established bursaries, such as the Care Leaver Bursary and EU Bursary, open to new students from Europe, the university has also recently doubled its student hardship fund for students who encounter sudden financial difficulties.

In addition, there are a number of schemes and offers available to help with the cost of living, including:

- A 1-year free Totum card giving discounts at over 400 shops, including supermarkets;
- The Commuter Bursary, offering 50% off every month's travel for those from a low-income household who experience challenging travel costs to attend university;
- The Greenwich Bursary is up to £700 for new undergraduate students with a low household income; and
- The International Scholarship scheme has a range of scholarships available from £1,000 up to £3,000.

Greenwich Students' Union's advice team offers help with money and has a cost-of-living plan on its website, where there are also tips on saving – such as charging devices on campus rather than at home – and help with budgeting. There is also debt advice available in conjunction with the Citizens' Advice Bureau.



Working with GSU, the university has launched Open Pantries on all three of its campuses to make sure students can get free food essentials, such as rice, pasta and beans, as well as toiletries and cleaning and sanitary products. There is fresh produce available for free at the university's Avery Hill campus edible garden, and the University of Greenwich has just started offering a free community breakfast for students on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

The university catering team is also making leftover food available for free on Wednesdays and Fridays 30 minutes before closing.

The cost-of-living remains a serious concern for all, and as such, the university is always looking for ways to do more. One of the areas it is currently exploring is how to support students to access cheap or free transport, a particular issue for many.





## Solent University

Home to a diverse student population, located in the heart of Southampton's multi-cultural communities discover how Solent University, Southampton is providing support to its communities during the cost-of-living crisis.

Recognising that the increasing cost-of-living is having an impact on home, work and studying the University announced a raft of measures at the beginning of the academic year to support its student and staff communities.

The University, which is already a National Living Wage Employer has provided staff with a one-off cost-of-living payment, recognising the increase in fuel and food prices during this time. The payment scheme has seen those on lower grades receive a higher payment, recognising the impact the crisis is having. In addition to this staff at Solent are able to access a salary advance, enabling them to access a portion of their salary early. The loan can be repaid over up to a six month period through payroll.

In addition to the financial support being provided the University is also offered staff and their families the opportunity to enjoy free festivities at a free children's Christmas party. The party, which was targeted at families with children aged 0 – 12 years provided a variety of festive entertainment and activities, enabling families to enjoy the festivities in a safe environment without the pressure of admission fees.





Colleagues at the University have also been able to access a complimentary breakfast each week throughout the term, with new saver menu and deals introduced across Solent's on campus catering outlets.

Students are at the core of Solent University through joint working with Solent Student's Union a range of support interventions have been put in place. A food pantry has been established on campus, featuring a food bank, thrift store and book exchange, enabling communities to access everyday essentials and exchange items. The University has also introduced a Utilities Bursary, helping eligible students in private accommodation cover their increased fuel bills. This bursary sits alongside a number of other bursaries which aim to support students in completing their studies, including the University's Local Student Bursary Scheme.

The Local Student Bursary Scheme, now in its third year, supports local students through a £1000 grant to support their studies. Previous beneficiaries have utilised the funds to support them with commuter and living costs. The 2022/23 academic year will see 30 additional bursaries awarded, thanks to the generosity of external donors.

As a civic university Solent also recognises the role it plays as an anchor institution, enabling its communities to come together and build future collaboration. The University was pleased to host Southampton's Cost-of-Living conference, bringing together local community representatives, academia and civic stakeholders to discuss the issues faced by residents and explore how existing support can be accessed and built upon.



## South Warwickshire NHS Foundation Trust

After an extremely challenging few years responding to COVID-19, and now facing new challenges with the cost-of-living crisis, the South Warwickshire NHS Foundation Trust decided in its 2022/23 objectives to place a big emphasis on staff health and wellbeing.

Supporting their workforce to stay well and ensure easy access to information that could help them in their personal and professional lives, has become a key priority for the Trust. To help with this, the Trust developed a Wellbeing Resource pack, an online platform created with a range of information and resources to keep staff well, including financial advice and support.

The rising cost-of-living can be difficult for many people, including NHS staff, to manage financially. This can contribute to stress and anxiety. The Trust's resource pack was created to help its workforce remain in control and have a better understanding of resources available to them. Included within the financial section of the platform are details of local and national support for debt and benefits, housing advice, help with household costs and food banks.

The Trust has also developed a 'Staff Financial Help Fund'. The purpose of the fund is to offer financial support to individuals who are suffering hardship due to any unforeseen short-term circumstances, and is open to anyone working at the Trust. The fund can be considered for a short-term loan and repayment plan, or a one-off loan without repayment, dependant on circumstances. All applications are anonymised before consideration by a panel.

The Trust are also committed to sustainability, which is demonstrated in its objective to achieve net zero for the carbon emissions it directly controls by 2040. As well as developing more sustainable healthcare models and being energy efficient in all its practices, the Trust is also encouraging staff to reflect on their own personal impact on the world.





Given the increase in energy costs, the Trust recognises how important it is to educate staff on ways they can be more sustainable to support their overall wellbeing. To support this holistic approach the Trust has been working with partners to embed more sustainable practices within its workforce. This has included providing dedicated training sessions for our Green Champions, with the aim of sharing practical tips on being more energy efficient, both at work and at home. As part of this the Trust has partnered with Act on Energy, a local energy charity in Warwickshire.

The Trust has 78 Green Champions, who are dedicated and passionate about making positive change and sharing information with their colleagues. New colleagues are always welcome to the network.



## Warwickshire County Council

The increased cost-of-living is the most pressing challenge facing residents and local communities across Warwickshire. Given the significant, historic disparities that exist, the impact of the cost-of-living on residents will vary significantly, and is dependent on factors such as housing type, pre-existing debt and household income.

It will differ between rural and urban places, affect more vulnerable groups disproportionately, and have substantial impacts on businesses across the county so our support offer needs to extend to them as well. Warwickshire County Council prides itself on being evidence-led – developing a support offer for residents was no exception. Acknowledging the wide range of impacts the cost-of-living could have, the Council knew that a wrap-around offer of support for residents could not be created alone. The County needed a Team Warwickshire approach, similar to how it developed its Levelling Up approach and how the Council drew partners together for the Covid response.

Before engaging wider partners, Warwickshire County Council wanted to set out its initial response, and in October, Cabinet approved a Cost-of-Living support offer and additional plans to help residents. The Council's existing offer included commissioned services such as affordable food provision, affordable warmth, general advice and support services as well as information and awareness schemes. The Council wanted to go further for residents in the immediate-term, whilst maintaining a level of support in the medium-term for the possibility that the cost-of-living is a sustained challenge. The Council used its most recent allocation from the Household Support Fund to provide increased funding for our Warwickshire Local Welfare Scheme, support provision of food, fuel and personal hygiene, and give additional resources to Act on Energy.

The Council also created a £1m budget to create support funds for food banks and other voluntary and community activities to support cost-of-living pressures, giving additional capacity and resources to

Citizens Advice, and creating a network of warm hubs, including but not limited to Council operated buildings such as libraries and museums and community venues. In addition to this, the Council has extended the funding for three community supermarkets across the county, which have been an integral part of the Community Powered Warwickshire programme, and community transport schemes to help the most vulnerable, and community transport schemes to help the most vulnerable get to medical appointments.

The Council has a key convening role to shape and influence the public sector response for Warwickshire. Councillors were certain that Warwickshire needed a consolidated, coordinated approach and in late September Full Council unanimously carried a motion to convene a Warwickshire Cost-of-Living Summit with key stakeholders and partners to support the development of a well-rounded support offer.

On the 25th of November 114 representatives from across the public, private and VCSE sectors, including our Town, Parish, District and Borough Council colleagues, came together to discuss how Warwickshire County Council could maximise the support offered to residents. The event was facilitated by Professor Sir Chris Ham, Co-Chair of the NHS Assembly, former Chair of the Coventry and Warwickshire Health and Care Partnership, and former Chief Executive of the King's Fund, supported by Dr Adam Lent, Chief Executive of New Local, our delivery partner for our Community Powered Warwickshire programme. The Council's pre-Summit activity gave registrants the opportunity to tell us their top three priorities or collective action on the cost-of-living. Warwickshire County Council received an incredible response which gave us valuable insight into how they could collectively support individuals, communities and businesses.

The priorities fell into four core themes: advice and communication, practical support for necessities, targeted support for the vulnerable, and access to opportunities. Being able to map alignment of priorities from such a wide range of partners has been indispensable, and ensured the offer of support is not duplicating or conflicting with others.



At the Summit, Warwickshire County Council were able to announce new activity that aligned with the core themes such as their brand-new Cost-of-Living microsite and helpline. Ensuring residents county-wide are informed of the support available and can easily access advice and help needed is the key to ensuring full take-up of their support offer. Warwickshire's workshop activity gave delegates the opportunity to move around and engage in focused discussions on eleven key themes; the outputs of these discussions will be used to guide the Council's response as it continues supporting residents in the short and medium term.

The Cost-of-Living Summit proved an important reminder of the richness of partners and the collective 'can do' approach Warwickshire has. We cannot forget the lessons learnt from the Council's Covid response; not only should Warwickshire continue to work with partners, but it needs to ensure communities and volunteers are fully engaged with its response as well. Maintaining a collective response is vital to ensuring residents and businesses endure this current challenge. Warwickshire County Council's aim for the future is that it can support communities to build resilience, so they are better equipped against the impacts of challenges such as the cost-of-living. The Council's Community Powered Warwickshire programme, which acknowledges the ability of communities to identify their own challenges

and priorities, and to suggest solutions to these, will be an essential part of the Council's medium-term response. The programme's delivery plan is extending ongoing activity to accelerate community powered approaches into activities aimed at easing cost-of-living pressure.

In the long-term, Warwickshire County Council's mission is Levelling Up. Its countywide Levelling Up approach aims to tackle longstanding and disparities by working collaboratively with partners to focus effort on priority communities and places. Levelling Up activity aims to tackle inequalities, increase social mobility and build the capacity and skills of Warwickshire's most deprived communities to become less vulnerable to the impacts of recurring difficulties, and tackling climate change so that future generations enjoy similar opportunities. Getting their response to the cost-of-living crisis right will help Warwickshire County Council deliver our collective long-term levelling up mission.



