

Un Llais Cymru



One Voice Wales

COST OF LIVING CRISIS SURVEY

May 2024



Ariennir gan
Lywodraeth Cymru

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Welsh Government

SUMMARY:



The Cost-of-Living Crisis has emerged as a significant challenge affecting communities across Wales, with rising prices and economic pressures significantly impacting the daily lives of residents.

The One Voice Wales: Cost-of-Living Crisis project conducted a survey to assess the level of awareness of the crisis among Community & Town Councils, their response to the crisis and to identify the key areas where communities are facing the most significant perceived challenges.

The survey results and analysis have been used to inform the project team to establish a specialist resource within One Voice Wales to advise Community & Town Councils across Wales to better support their Communities as the Cost-of-Living Crisis becomes deeper and more severe.

'The cost-of-living crisis is persisting with deepening severity for households in Wales. It is having a profound and compounded effect on the lives of many people, with economic projections suggesting that the crisis will continue well into 2024 and will have long-term consequences.'

The Living Standards Outlook 2023 • Resolution Foundation



KEY SURVEY INSIGHTS:

HIGH AWARENESS, LIMITED ACTION

Although **97% of Councils** report awareness of the cost-of-living crisis, only **53% have active initiatives** addressing the issue. The gap highlights a critical area for Councils to potentially translate awareness into effective action.



CRITICAL AREAS OF PERCEIVED NEED

The **primary struggles** perceived to be faced by residents include affording **heating and electricity** (81%), **housing** (65%), and **transport** (63%). These areas represent urgent needs where there is potential for Councils to focus their efforts for the greatest impact.

COMMUNITY SUPPORT NEEDS

There is a significant perceived **demand for community support** in areas such as **youth support** (56%), **benefits advice & debt management** (50%), and **activities for older people** (49%). These needs offer a blueprint for the Cost-of-Living Crisis Project team to develop **targeted advisory services** that in turn can support Councils in developing targeted services to communities.

ENGAGEMENT & COMMUNICATION

The findings also underscore the need for **enhanced engagement with residents** regarding available support and any initiatives in place with 61% of Councils indicating that they have insufficient information about council roles in combatting the crisis.



KEY FINDINGS & THEMES:



STRUGGLES & NEEDS IDENTIFICATION

A significant majority (97%) of Councils are aware of the cost-of-living crisis, demonstrating a widespread recognition of the issue. Many Councils noted the visible struggles within their communities.

“Yes. We see it and feel it around us as businesses and residents struggle to make ends meet”

Despite this high level of awareness, only **53% of councils are actively running initiatives** targeted at addressing the crisis, indicating a gap between awareness and action.

The near-universal awareness among councils of the cost-of-living crisis contrasts sharply with the proportion actively seeking resident input on related initiatives. This discrepancy underscores a potential disconnect between councils' recognition of the crisis and their engagement with the community's lived experiences and suggestions for meaningful solutions.

“Living in a very rural area, access to transport is essential, as there is no public transport in the area car ownership is essential”

While awareness is a critical first step, the effectiveness of any response is significantly enhanced when it is shaped by those it aims to support. This gap could suggest a need for more proactive and inclusive approaches to governance, where resident participation is not just welcomed but actively sought.

One council hosted a public meeting in January 2024 as a platform for discussion but conversely, several councils suggested they were finding residents appetite for engagement to be very low despite their best efforts.

Councils perceived that the Primary areas where residents are struggling include affording heating & electricity (81%), housing (65%), and access to transport (63%) highlighting the urgent need for targeted support and interventions.



KEY FINDINGS & THEMES:

INITIATIVES & SUPPORT MECHANISMS

There is a notable disparity in the types of initiatives councils are currently running, with a significant number (47%) reporting no ongoing initiatives. Among those that are active, **meeting others/social groups**, **warm spaces**, and **activities for older people** are the most common.

Councils also thought that there was a need for community support in youth programs (56%), benefits advice & debt management (50%), and activities for older people (49%). These areas are crucial for enhancing the quality of life and the well-being of communities.



“Grosvenor (ward) was no. 5 in the ranking of food parcels issued by Wrexham Food Bank last year”

The survey highlights the **multifaceted nature of the challenges** residents face, with a significant number perceived to be struggling to afford basic necessities such as heating, electricity, housing, and food. Highlighting acute food insecurity in certain areas.

Councils shared some of the **unique initiatives** that they are involved with e.g. Community Vegetable Growing Schemes. However, there is also a recognised need for more structured support in areas like debt management and youth support.

Innovative local initiatives showcase the potential for creative solutions to address aspects of the Cost-of-Living crisis. These efforts not only provide immediate benefits but also strengthen community resilience and cohesion.

The variation in the application of such projects is highlighted by the feedback and points to a significant opportunity for Councils to learn from one another. **The One Voice Wales Cost of Living Project can share successful initiatives & encourage the adoption of these approaches across further councils.**

“The council currently grows fruit and vegetables for the Community to help themselves to”



KEY FINDINGS & THEMES:



AWARENESS & ACCESS TO FUNDING

A small fraction of councils have been successful in receiving grant funding to support residents, with 9% confirming success. Awareness is also low with 20% of Councils reporting no knowledge about available grants. The varied awareness and success in obtaining grant funding point to a potential area for enhancing their capacity to support residents.

Proactively pursuing funding opportunities whether through grant applications or partnerships, can provide Councils with additional project could develop services around communicating funding opportunities to Councils as they become available and will help increase the chances of securing additional financial support.

“Periodic circulation of emails drawing awareness to funding opportunities”

EXPANDING COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

Councils predominantly use **social media** (66%) and **notice boards** (74%) to **communicate** information about support and initiatives, indicating a shift towards digital and accessible forms of communication.

The reliance on social media and notice boards as primary communication channels reflects an adaptation to modern and accessible forms of communication. However, the effectiveness of these strategies depends on their reach and the extent to which they engage with the diverse segments of the community.

Enhancing communication strategies involves not only diversifying the channels used but also ensuring that messaging is clear, accessible, and responsive to the evolving needs of residents.



KEY FINDINGS & THEMES:

BUILDING & LEVERAGING COLLABORATIONS

The importance of collaboration both within communities and external organisations emerges as a key theme. Collaborations with local community groups, businesses, and voluntary organisations can amplify Councils efforts to address the Cost-of-Living Crisis.



Partnerships with Voluntary Organisations (50%) are the most common, indicating a strong reliance on the Third Sector to provide critical services and support. Collaboration with businesses (20%) and Government bodies (24%) is less common which may represent an under-utilised opportunity for Councils to broaden their support networks and leverage additional resources.

“Working together with a new local community group (Grwp LlanNi) to try to establish a Community Hub with Big Lottery Funds through the help of Rural Futures.”

“We have recently supported the beginnings of Rossett Food Cupboard which has been a huge success in the village“

This perfectly illustrates how **collaborative efforts** can lead to **sustainable support mechanisms**. Strengthening these collaborations can enhance Councils capacity to mobilise resources, share knowledge, and coordinate responses more effectively.



ONE VOICE WALES: COST-OF-LIVING CRISIS PROJECT



PROGRAMME OF WORK FOR COMMUNITY & TOWN COUNCILS

“I feel that more information could be made available to Town & Community Councils as how to provide more realistic and achievable help to the local community”

One Voice Wales, as a representative body for Community & Town Councils in Wales, can have a pivotal role in coordinating and amplifying efforts to address the cost-of-living crisis at the local level.

Since the inception of the Cost-of-Living project, the team has undertaken extensive information gathering, including this Cost-of-Living Crisis Survey to develop a proposed programme of work to support Councils in their efforts to mitigate the impacts of this crisis on their communities.

“information is available on the challenges but it's not always clear what town and community councils can do”

The findings of the survey point to the broader economic pressures affecting communities and the need for targeted support. Furthermore, the varied nature of these struggles underscores the importance of tailored initiatives that address specific needs rather than a one-size-fits-all approach.

Any support initiatives must recognise and respond to the complexity of the crisis by implementing a range of initiatives that collectively address the spectrum of challenges faced by communities.



ONE VOICE WALES: PROGRAMME OF WORK FOR COUNCILS

PROGRAMME OF WORK FOR COMMUNITY & TOWN COUNCILS

“Information on all of the above would be welcomed. Especially if there are examples of activities being undertaken by other community councils which we could emulate”



With this in mind, the cost-of-living crisis project team proposes delivering a programme of work themed into six ‘Action’ Areas.

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1		Community & Warm Spaces	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Warm Hubs • Social Groups • Activities for Older People • Hobby Groups 	
2		Food	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Free Meals • Food banks • Community Fridges • Lunch Clubs 	
3		Health & Wellbeing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exercise Groups • Wellness Activities • Mental Health Support • Charitable Donations 	
4		Clothing & Repurposing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clothing Banks • Repair Cafes • Community Skips • Clothes Swap/Uniform Banks 	
5		Benefits, Budgeting Debt Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Benefits Advice • Budgeting Support • Public Awareness Information • Access to Banking 	
6		Transport	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Buses • Car Share • Hospital Transport • Wheels To Work 	



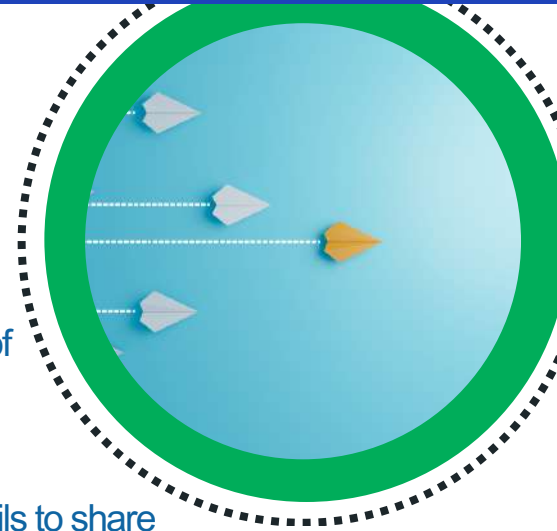
ONE VOICE WALES: PROGRAMME OF WORK FOR COUNCILS

Under these Six Action Areas, the project proposes there will be the following key components:



Capacity Building & Training

- **Webinars & Training Workshops:** offering a series of webinars & workshops focused on addressing cost of living issues covered by each of the six Action Areas.
- **Best Practice Sharing** – Facilitate sessions for councils to share innovative approaches and successful initiatives in tackling the cost-of-living challenges.



Information & Resources

- **Web Hub** – as part of the OVW Website, a dedicated Cost-of-Living area will be established where councils can access a comprehensive repository of resources including Case Studies, Toolkits, recordings of past Webinars etc.
- **Toolkit Development** – develop toolkits for Councils on various aspects of addressing the Cost-of-Living crisis such as establishing food banks, warm hubs, community transport services, and other community support services.



Networking & Collaboration

- **Cost-of-Living Crisis Forum:** Establish a platform for Councils to connect, share experiences, and potentially form partnerships with other councils.
- **Joint initiatives:** Encourage and facilitate the development of joint initiatives among councils to address common challenges related to the cost-of-living crisis.
- **Feedback Mechanisms:** this forum can be a mechanism for Councils to provide feedback on the challenges they face and the support they need, ensuring the programme remains responsive and relevant.
- **Impact Information:** the forum will also provide an opportunity to understand the impact of the cost-of-living crisis in communities and identify effective interventions.



ONE VOICE WALES: PROGRAMME OF WORK FOR COUNCILS



Signposting, Communication & Public Awareness

- **Social Media Support:** offer training & resources to help councils effectively use social media and other communication channels to reach and engage with their communities.
- **Public Awareness & Signposting:** support councils in developing and implementing public awareness campaigns about available support and resources to help residents navigate the cost-of-living crisis.



Advocacy & Policy Support

- **Representation:** Advocate on behalf of Councils to national and regional governments for policies and resources that address the cost-of-living crisis and importantly provide recognition for the work that is being/has been delivered.
- **Policy Guidance:** Provide Councils with guidance on navigating the legal and regulatory frameworks when implementing cost-of-living initiatives.

This programme of events and activities is designed to address the critical perceived issues raised in the survey. The programme will take into account that not all Community & Town Councils are equally resourced, and any outputs will consider the needs/capabilities of larger and smaller Councils.

Using an approach that considers a combination of training, resources, advocacy, and collaboration, One Voice Wales can empower Community & Town Councils to implement effective solutions, share best practices, and foster a collective approach to tackling these challenges. This programme will not only address immediate needs but also contribute to building resilient communities equipped to handle further future challenges.

For more information on the One Voice Wales Cost-of-Living Crisis project contact the team at CoLC@onevoicewales.wales

