

# Understanding and addressing the cost-of-living crisis

Date: 27<sup>th</sup> July 2022

Report of: Director of Communities, Housing and Environment

Report to: Executive Board

Will the decision be open for call in?  Yes  No

Does the report contain confidential or exempt information?  Yes  No

## Brief summary

The report provides an overview of the current cost-of-living crisis and sets the economic context in which over the past decade poverty and inequality have increased.

The key measures being undertaken nationally to address the cost-of-living crisis are outlined. However, the focus of the report is on the local approach from a welfare and financial inclusion perspective, with key actions and programmes highlighted.

It is recognised that current local action alone may not be enough to mitigate the impact, and that a greater focus will be required across all three pillars of the Best City Ambition in sustainably addressing deep rooted poverty and inequality within the city.

## Recommendations

Members of Executive Board are recommended to;

- a) Note the content of this report and endorse the approach being adopted.
- b) Endorse the next steps set out fully in paragraphs 94- 99 to accelerate progress towards the mission set out in the Best City Ambition through:
  - Ensuring the three pillars of the Best City Ambition strongly and consistently reflect the challenges of tackling poverty and inequality.
  - Transitioning to a new performance framework for the Best City Ambition to reinforce and embed linkages between the three pillars in tackling poverty and inequality.
  - Establishing a breakthrough priority with the aim of: “working together across sectors to harness the capacity and capability in the city, its communities and those with lived experience to develop a city solution to welfare provision and addressing the cost-of-living crisis – with a specific focus on food, fuel, housing and digital inclusion”.
- c) Note that the Chief Officer for Community Hubs, Welfare and Business Support will be responsible for overseeing and implementing the actions and recommendations in this report.

## What is this report about?

- 1 The report provides an overview of the cost-of-living crisis and the impact that this is having on households living on the lowest incomes in Leeds. The report highlights, in headline terms, the wider economic forces which are exacerbating the crisis, and which have been at the root of entrenched poverty and inequality over many years. While the detail of this report focuses on efforts to mitigate the worst impacts, it also brings into focus how our Best City Ambition to tackle poverty and inequality requires renewed energy to target the root causes of poverty, making the best use of our available resources with this mission in mind.
- 2 The report focusses on the Council's response from a welfare perspective and provides an update on the work undertaken by Leeds City Council and partners to tackle poverty and improve financial inclusion.
- 3 Responding to the cost-of-living crisis has also been identified as one of Team Leeds' breakthrough priorities. This recognises that we need to work together across sectors to harness the capacity and capability in the city, its communities and those with lived experience to develop a city solution to welfare provision and mitigate where we can against the worst impacts of the cost-of-living crisis.
- 4 **Background Information**
- 5 22% of the Leeds' population is living in relative poverty after housing costs are deducted from income. This equates to approximately 174,000 people.
- 6 Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the combined impact of austerity with sustained public sector funding reductions, welfare reform, and an increase in low paid and insecure employment have all contributed to increasing and deepening levels of poverty in Leeds and across the UK. Research undertaken in Leeds concluded that in 2018 residents were less resilient and worse prepared for an external shock or crisis than in 2004, with significantly lower propensity to save and higher likelihood of being in debt.
- 7 The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 proved to be such a crisis, increasing pressures on low-income households and the most vulnerable in society, as well as pushing many additional households to experience financial uncertainty and hardship for the first time.
- 8 Numerous supportive measures were implemented at both national and local levels during the pandemic (e.g. benefit up rates and conditionality easements, furlough, self-employed income support scheme, ban on evictions and various short term-funding initiatives for local authorities), providing temporary relief to many households. However, these measures were not enough to lift households out of poverty, or to prevent more households from falling into financial hardship.
- 9 Many vulnerable groups including low-income households were disproportionately affected by issues such as reductions in income due to job losses, and the later removal of national support measures/schemes such as furlough, and removal of the £20 Universal Credit (UC) uplift, all occurring alongside increasing household costs due to rising bills, energy usage and supply challenges.
- 10 In addition, as outlined in the 'Living with Covid- What does living with Covid mean for Leeds?' Executive Board report the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has widened health inequalities across the city, the UK, and internationally.
- 11 Citizens Advice estimated that 6 million people fell behind with at least one payment directly due to the pandemic. In addition, Joseph Rowntree Foundation found that 87% of low-income households now in debt, having not been so before the onset of the pandemic.
- 12 In 2022, the financial pressure on households has only intensified. Inflation and the cost of living continues to rise, with the prices of food, fuel and energy being particularly affected, all of

which disproportionately impact low-income households. The immediate concern is winter 2022, which coupled with the rising prices are also likely to see impacts of winter illnesses including flu and covid. This will further contribute to health and income inequalities.

13 The overall situation is leading to rising numbers of people facing financial hardship and falling into debt, as well as claiming benefits, seeking advice, support and access to food aid and other crisis support services.

#### 14 **Main issues**

15 Although poverty and financial exclusion have been deep-rooted challenges for many years, key factors affecting the current financial climate in 2022 have further escalated the situation, leading to what is now being described as a 'cost-of-living crisis'.

16 Inflation has risen steeply in 2022 due to the impact of the COVID-19 crisis, global supply issues, significant rises in gas and oil prices, and the war in Ukraine. UK inflation currently stands at 9.1%, the highest level for 40 years. Inflation is forecast to continue to rise to over 10% later this year, with the poorest households most hardest hit, as essential goods and services are likely to be most severely affected.

17 In addition, broader household costs have been rising steadily with increases in National Insurance and utility bills, meaning a real term cut in take-home earnings for many before the recent spike in inflation impacted. Benefit levels, although uprated in April 2022 by 3.1%, have also failed to keep up with rising household expenditure.

#### 18 **Energy**

19 In April, Ofgem increased the energy price cap by 54%, resulting in an annual rise of almost £700 for those who pay by direct debit. Those on default tariffs have seen increases of £693 from £1,277 to up to £1,971 per year, while prepayment customers (predominantly those on lower incomes) have seen an increase of £708 from £1,309 to up to £2,017.

20 The energy cap is set to increase again by a further 20% in October 2022, however in May 2022, further plans were announced to allow the price cap to change every three months, meaning prices could rise even further in the interim.

21 Under normal circumstances, customers facing increases in energy costs would be able to compare prices and/or switch supplier to save money, however in the current market, this is no longer achievable.

#### 22 **Food**

23 According to market analysts Kantar, food prices rose at their fastest pace in more than eight years during February 2022, hitting 4.3%, representing the steepest rise since September 2013.

24 The Institute of Grocery Distribution (IGD) have also forecast that food price inflation is likely to peak at up to 15% in summer and will remain at high levels into 2023.

25 In April 2022, a study by the Food Foundation found 7.3 million adults live in households that said they had gone without food or could not physically get food in the past month, which includes 2.6 million children. This is compared with 4.7 million adults in January and equates to a 57% increase.

26 National statistics show food is the largest item of household expenditure for low-income households after housing, fuel, and power costs. Rises in food prices are more difficult for low-income households to cope with because they must spend a greater proportion of their income on food, leaving less money available to spend elsewhere.

27 Some communities are disproportionately affected by food insecurity. For example, research has shown BAME communities consistently encountered higher levels of food insecurity during

the pandemic, while adults with disabilities have also been more acutely affected compared with those without disabilities.

28 Between 1st April 2021 and 31st March 2022, 64,636 food parcels in Leeds were given out via Community Care Hubs and Emergency Food Provisions. Although citywide emergency food processes have largely reduced in line with the removal of lockdown and shielding measures, local organisations involved with food aid in the city are reporting that demand has continued above pre-pandemic levels, and a significant level of need remains. This is in relation to both emergency provisions such as food parcels, as well as affordable food schemes such as local pantry's and social supermarkets.

## 29 **Welfare**

30 In February 2020 (pre-pandemic), 33,715 people were claiming UC in Leeds, by March 2021 this had increased to a high of 74,515. The latest available data shows in May 2022, that figure has now reduced to 70,722 UC claimants, however this remains more than double the pre-pandemic level.

31 Universal Credit continues to present challenges which have been raised both nationally and by local support organisations and partners, including:

- Risks for vulnerable claimants and their capacity to access benefits and support
- The initial 5 week wait for payment
- Deductions policies (including debts and sanctions)
- The quality of decision-making
- Immigration related challenges

32 The changes and easements to Universal Credit implemented during the pandemic have now ended and despite positive welfare changes announced as part of recent budgets, the changes announced are only beneficial to some working UC households. The Resolution Foundation identified that 'three quarters of households on UC would still be worse off as a result of the removal of the £20 uplift alone despite the reduction in the taper rate and increase to work allowances'.

33 Citizens Advice Leeds estimate that the removal of the £20 resulted in £66 million in lost income (per annum) to UC claimants in Leeds alone.

34 The issue of benefits levels not accurately reflecting the cost of living, has been continuously highlighted at both national and local levels.

35 In April 2022, benefit levels were updated by 3.1 per cent, well below the March inflation level of 7%.

36 Current forecasts suggest the rate of inflation in September 2022 could result in benefits and state pension increasing by almost 10% in April 2023, however many organisations including Citizens Advice, are calling for this increase to be brought forward, in order to help alleviate the pressure on low income households in 2022.

## 37 **What is being done to address the need?**

### 38 **National measures**

39 In recent months the Government has made a series of announcements and interventions aimed at easing the inflationary burden on households. These include;

- Fuel Duty cut: From 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2022, petrol and diesel fuel duty was cut by 5 pence per litre for a period of 12 months.

- Energy Bill Support Scheme: All domestic energy customers in Great Britain will receive a £400 grant to help with the cost of their energy bills through the Energy Bill Support Scheme.
- Council Tax Rebate: Households liable for Council Tax in Bands A-D in Great Britain will receive a £150 Council Tax Rebate to help with the rising cost of bills. A total of £144 million in discretionary funding has also been provided to local authorities to support households who are not eligible for the Council Tax reduction.
- DWP - Cost of Living Payments: One-off cost of living payments will be administered by the DWP. Eligible households will get a payment of £650 paid in two lump sums of £326 and £324 if they're entitled to any of the following:
  - Universal Credit
  - income-based Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA)
  - income-related Employment and Support Allowance (ESA)
  - Income Support
  - Pension Credit

Households who do not qualify for a payment will include those in receipt of Housing Benefit who do not receive one of the above benefits. Households in receipt of New Style Employment and Support Allowance, contributory Employment and Support Allowance, or New Style Jobseeker's Allowance will also not qualify unless they are also in receipt of Universal Credit. Further payments for claimants in vulnerable groups will also be made as follows;

- Pensioner cost of living payment - £300 for all pensioner households aged 66 or above paid alongside the Winter Fuel Payment.
- Disability cost of living payment - £150 for Claimants who receive eligible disability benefits.

40 There have been further calls for the Government to do more, for example by increasing benefits to the most vulnerable, tackling the costs of childcare and protecting frontline public services.

#### 41 **Local response**

- 42 Leeds City Council and partners have been working to address financial inclusion in Leeds since 2003. The work has focused on building knowledge, research, and a strong collaborative partnership to develop innovative and sustainable actions for the residents of Leeds. The Leeds Financial Inclusion Steering group has met regularly since 2005 and is a forum for sharing work, ideas, and best practice.
- 43 The successful partnership based approach has been recognised through national awards and most recently when the "End High Cost Credit Alliance" which was founded by actor and activist Michael Sheen named Leeds the first "Fair Credit for All City."
- 44 The depth of experience and the strength of the partnership, developed over many years will continue to be central to the city's response and approach to tackling poverty and inequality. This way of working is even more important now as both national and local COVID-19 response and recovery measures, including funding allocated to the local authority, have ultimately not been enough to prevent increasing numbers of households falling into poverty and hardship during and since the pandemic.
- 45 A key focus of the current partnership activity in the city is managing the short-term government funding programmes that have been put in place to help mitigate the impact of increasing poverty. Details of the key areas of activities are highlighted below;
- 46 **Department for Education Holiday Activity and Food Funding- Healthy Holidays**

- 47 The Healthy Holidays scheme has been running in Leeds for four years, and has previously been led by Leeds Community Foundation, in partnership with Leeds City Council. In 2021, the Department for Education significantly increased funding and expanded the programme to all Local Authorities, in addition to committing to funding for 2022, 2023, and 2024.
- 48 The programme provides activities and food over the Easter, Summer and Christmas holidays to children eligible for Free School Meals, and a small number of additional children who are otherwise vulnerable. Leeds City Council now leads the programme, in partnership with Leeds Community Foundation. Despite significant challenges posed by the pandemic and the rapid scheme expansion, Leeds has been able to maintain provisions successfully in all holiday periods permitted by the Department for Education.
- 49 Leeds received funding of £3.5 million for programmes over the Easter, Summer and Christmas holidays in 2022. Over 120 schools, 50 third sector organisations and over 20 council provisions (consisting of community hubs, Breeze and the youth service) have been funded.
- 50 Easter 2022 provisions reached 6942 children and young people (5514 primary aged children, 1428 secondary aged young people) with 20,000 on site attendances and 35,000 portions of food distributed.
- 51 The summer programme is estimated to reach 8500 children and young people, and the focus is to continue to build and expand the programme over the coming years.
- 52 Whilst the funding from the Department for Education is welcomed, this scheme does have limitations, and it is not the solution to tackling food poverty within holiday periods for all children living in low income households. The funding is insufficient to include all eligible children, and, in addition to this funding limitation, the programme is inherently restricted to 10 of the 13 weeks of annual school holiday.
- 53 The scheme is successful within the constraints and operates as leverage for the promotion of wider partnerships and change throughout Leeds. Examples of this include funding and supporting the backpack scheme through Zarach, the uniform exchange scheme through Zero Waste Leeds, swimming catch up sessions through Active Leeds, upskilling providers in food and nutritional education through Zest/ Foodwise Leeds, and a range of training opportunities for all healthy holidays providers. In addition, the programme has strengthened links between directorates and services within the Council, bringing added value for money for the scheme and more widely. The Leeds City Council provider working group ensures that services across the council are fully aware of each other's offer and are more able to coordinate to enrich and streamline the provision for children and young people.

#### **54 Household Support Fund**

- 55 In response to the cost-of-living crisis the government announced a continuation of the Household Support Fund in March 2022. The funding is allocated to all local authorities across the country and is to be used to support low-income families with the costs of food, fuel and essential items. Leeds City Council has received £7.1 million to distribute by the end of September 2022.
- 56 The funding requirements state that at least a third of the funding must go on families with children, at least a third on pensioner households and up to a third on other working age households.
- 57 As a result, the funding is being utilised to provide direct cash awards to 64,000 people in receipt of Council Tax Support totalling. Additionally, the funding is also being provided to council services and third sector organisations, to support the target groups with the costs of food, energy, and essential items.
- 58 Further funding has been announced for October to the end of March 2023, but the details of the remit of this funding are still to be confirmed.

## 59 **Local Welfare Support Scheme**

- 60 Central Government provided ring-fenced funding to Local Authorities for the provision of Local Welfare Support Schemes (LWS) until 2015/16. At this time, many local authorities either reduced or ceased to operate LWS schemes, however Leeds has been able to maintain its own provision through internal funding, prioritising the most vulnerable groups.
- 61 Leeds' Local Welfare Support Scheme is designed to provide short-term support to residents in crisis, typically consisting of an award made up of one or a number of the following: food hamper/e-voucher, fuel vouchers, white goods, furniture and flooring, all underpinned by advice, guidance and signposting to additional services and partner agencies.
- 62 The Scheme evolved during the pandemic to meet the increasing demand for emergency support and is currently under review, in order to determine how better support can be provided to customers in need, ultimately with an aim of reducing dependency on support services across the city.
- 63 The review is also inclusive of a Cash Grant Pilot (run in partnership with the Food Aid Network and Trussell Trust), which began on 3 October 2021, and provided an opportunity to trial a new approach and new systems, with a view to making it part of the permanent offer, subject to available funding and successful evaluation.
- 64 In the interim, the Council has recently increased fuel awards via the Local Welfare Support Scheme by 54%, in line with the recent energy price cap rise, to provide proportionate support to the most vulnerable residents. The scheme has also further developed existing partnership working arrangements with local community organisations, to ensure fuel awards are complemented by wraparound support.

## 65 **Food Insecurity**

- 66 For many years there has been a strong partnership approach to tackling food insecurity in Leeds. This includes the Leeds Food Aid Network (which brings together a wide range of food aid organisations), FareShare Yorkshire, Rethink Food and Foodwise, working in collaboration with colleagues from across the council, universities, businesses & the third sector.
- 67 The depth of the experience and the strength of the partnership was crucial in the city's response to the pandemic. The Leeds Food Insecurity Taskforce has been established bringing together a wide range of organisations to build and strengthen the city's approach across all sectors. The aim of the taskforce is to provide a forum to aid the development of long term and sustainable approaches to tackling food insecurity in Leeds which reduces the need for crisis support and food banks.

## 68 **Money Information and Awareness Raising**

- 69 The [Leeds Money Information Centre \(MIC\)](#) website brings together free, independent and quality marked money and financial support for the city, covering a range of subjects such as benefits, debt, loans and savings, affordable credit, household budgeting and emergency food support. The website is regularly reviewed to ensure that all service delivery information is up to date and accurate.
- 70 Additional resources including digital and hard copy flyers, signposting to where Leeds residents can find advice and support for key issues such as energy and money advice are also available and have been translated into the top 8 community languages. These resources are shared widely across council services and partners organisations. Current versions are attached at appendix one.
- 71 The '**Times are Hard**' campaign has also been launched to promote the services available within the Council Community Hubs and Libraries. This includes signposting and advice on fuel, welfare rights, housing, employment support, local welfare support and debt and money advice,

alongside the engaging activities within the libraries. A mix of communication channels have been used including through social media, improved web content, banners in community hubs and through partners organisations. In addition, all frontline staff have received training on financial support services available in the city.

72 The **Financial Inclusion team** along with partners including advice providers, Welfare Rights, Leeds Credit Union, the Green Doctor and food aid providers regularly provide training and awareness sessions. The aim being to ensure that frontline staff across relevant organisations have a good understanding of the support and advice available within the city. The key message is to ensure that advice and support is sought at the earliest opportunity from trusted and accredited services. Whilst this work is very necessary and valuable, as already highlighted the impact of the years of austerity, the pandemic, and the cost-of-living crisis means that for many low income households incomes are failing to cover basic living costs, which limits the solutions available.

73 The **Leeds Inclusive Anchors** network are also considering how they as the largest employers within the city address the cost-of-living crisis, which could include awareness raising events and literature, an event will be held in the autumn to further develop the approach.

#### 74 **Leeds Advice Contract**

75 Locally, Leeds City Council funds general advice services via the Leeds Advice Service contract. Operating at a local level since 2014 this service provides an independent collective of partner organisations working together to offer free, impartial and confidential advice through a mixed provision of face to face, telephone and digital support to any Leeds resident, covering a range of issues, focusing on benefits, housing, employment and debt. Citizens Advice Leeds successfully delivers this contract in partnership with Chapeltown Citizens Advice and Better Leeds Communities.

#### 76 **Leeds Welfare Rights Unit**

77 Leeds City Council's Welfare Rights Unit provides free, confidential, impartial advice and support to Leeds residents for all UK welfare benefits, including; help to complete claim forms, guidance and support when making appeals, benefit entitlement checks and guidance on using benefit systems. Leeds Welfare Rights Unit also provide signposting and referral support to other agencies in the city for clients with wider/additional support needs.

78 Between April 21 and March 22 the service assisted 30,362 clients compared to 23,416 for the period April 20 to March 21.

#### 79 **Council Tax Support (CTS)**

80 CTS is a means-tested discount awarded to residents on low incomes to reduce their Council Tax bill. There are currently 63,692 households in Leeds in receipt of CTS, of which 20,210 are pensioners.

81 Pensioner households can receive a discount of up to 100% but most working-age households are restricted to a maximum discount of 75%. Some of the poorest households in the city are asked to contribute 25% towards their Council Tax bill and as Council Tax charges and fuel prices increase, this can become less affordable.

82 Currently around 16k "protected" working-age households receive CTS covering up to 100% of the Council Tax charge but these protections are lost when residents migrate to Universal Credit.

83 The total cost of CTS awards in Leeds during 2021/22 was £55.4M and this cost is expected to rise to £56.1M in 2022/23.

#### 84 **Housing Benefit (HB)**



- 85 Housing Benefit can help residents to pay their rent if they're unemployed, on a low income or claiming benefits. It is being replaced by Universal Credit for most Working-Age residents.
- 86 Residents can only make a new claim for Housing Benefit if either they have reached State Pension age or they live in supported, sheltered or temporary housing.
- 87 There are 34,000 residents claiming HB in Leeds. The HB caseload in Leeds has decreased by 24,960 since Universal Credit was rolled out in October 2018.
- 88 Many low-income households in receipt of Housing Benefit or the Housing Costs element of Universal Credit continue to be impacted by the "Bedroom Tax" and/or the Benefit Cap meaning their housing costs are not covered in full by their benefit.
- 89 Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP)**
- 90 DHP can be awarded to residents, who require financial assistance towards their housing costs because their housing benefit or universal credit housing costs does not fully meet their rental liability. In some cases, DHP can also cover rent in advance and bonds. For an application to be successful, applicants must demonstrate both financial hardship and exceptional circumstances.
- 91 The DWP allocate a DHP grant to each Local Authority. In Leeds for the last 3 years, the Council have topped up the DHP fund by £500k. During 2021/22 the Council received 4238 DHP applications and the full Government contribution of £1,679,527 for 2021/22 was awarded to residents in Leeds. Additionally, a further £483,809 was awarded to residents using the contribution from the Leeds HRA.
- 92 The Government have confirmed Leeds will receive a reduced DHP budget for the 2022/23 financial year. Leeds have received £1.16M, meaning the value of the cut to Leeds is £513,318 or 30.57% compared to last year's funding. Further funding may be available later in the year, however based on the amount available nationally, the value of any further award is not expected to fully cover the cut in funding. This is likely to result in a reduction in the number of DHP awards overall, as well as a reduction in the funds allocated per award.
- 93 What Next?**
- 94 Leeds City Council and partners across the city have been recognised for the work undertaken to reduce poverty and tackle inequality for many years. Throughout ten years of austerity and reduced public sector budgets and resources, Leeds has employed a highly effective collaborative and co-ordinated approach to tackling poverty.
- 95 Despite this, poverty and financial exclusion have continued to worsen in Leeds and across the UK, and in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic (which had already exacerbated poverty and financial hardship), the situation has now been further intensified by the emerging cost of living crisis.
- 96 Barriers including lack of awareness or understanding, individual support needs and digital exclusion are further compounding the situation and are preventing people from reaching services.
- 97 With more households experiencing hardship for the first time, and households already below the poverty line facing destitution and desperation, the significant and wide-ranging citywide support offer must be both maintained and enhanced in order to support Leeds residents.
- 98 Supporting and enhancing the citywide welfare and support offer will not be enough, however, in the face of escalating challenges. The resources available will not be sufficient to meet the scale of the need. As such, re-energising council and citywide efforts to target the root causes of poverty and inequality, providing people with the support and opportunities they need to earn a good living and enjoy a healthy, secure family life, are more important than ever. This is the basis for our Best City Ambition.

99 In light of this, there are three clear but connected ways forward which we propose should now be prioritised:

- a) **Best City Ambition - tackling poverty and inequality** – There is an opportunity with the upcoming reviews of the Health and Wellbeing and Inclusive Growth strategies, together with on-going work to strengthen the strategic framework supporting our Zero Carbon ambitions, to more strongly reflect the mission outlined in the Best City Ambition, and specifically to further address the underpinning challenges of tackling poverty and inequality. This work on the three pillars will help to ensure an even sharper focus on targeting efforts and interventions around those people living on low incomes and at greatest risk of experiencing poverty. This might also include some shorter-term objectives on tackling the cost of living explicitly. The establishment of a refreshed performance reporting framework will also support the transition from the Best Council Plan to the Best City Ambition.
- b) **Driving policy and accountability** – through the revised performance framework underpinning the Best City Ambition which is currently being developed and the new Leeds Social Progress Index. Both of these approaches provide an opportunity to strengthen indicators and reporting around the impact of the city’s efforts to tackle poverty and inequality, relative to how other comparable places in the UK are performing. The revised performance framework also provides an opportunity to reinforce and embed linkages between the three pillars in tackling poverty and inequality.
- a) **Taking a breakthrough approach to accelerate progress** – the council has set out a proposal to create a breakthrough priority with the aim of: “working together across sectors to harness the capacity and capability in the city, its communities and those with lived experience to develop a city solution to welfare provision and addressing the cost-of-living crisis – with a specific focus on food, fuel, housing and digital inclusion”. Building on both the existing citywide support infrastructure and learning from the COVID-19 pandemic emergency response, it is also proposed that the Financial Inclusion Team will look to establish a strategic, cross cutting welfare group, in order to take a proactive, collaborative approach on key issues relating to food, fuel, housing and digital.

### What impact will this proposal have?

100 The proposal will ensure that there is a strategic, coordinated and collaborative response to the cost-of-living crisis. Formation of the proposed cross cutting, strategic group will ensure that further support measures are established with the specific aim of supporting families impacted by the cost-of-living crisis. The focus of the group will be Food, Fuel, Housing and Digital.

101 The focus of this report is on poverty and inequality which is protected equality characteristic. It sets out the impact of the cost-of-living crisis will have on households living on the lowest incomes in the city, the actions currently being undertaken to mitigate the impact and the proposed citywide approach. Equality, Diversity, Cohesion and Integration screening will be undertaken as appropriate for each future measure.

### How does this proposal impact the three pillars of the Best City Ambition?

Health and Wellbeing       Inclusive Growth       Zero Carbon

102 Please see paragraph 99 above.

103 The work of the Council’s Financial Inclusion and Welfare and Benefits teams contributes to achieving Leeds Best City Ambition, which sets at its heart the mission to tackle poverty and inequality and improve the quality of life for everyone who calls Leeds home.

104 The cost-of-living crisis will impact all three key pillars of the Best City Ambition.

**What consultation and engagement has taken place?**

Wards affected:

Have ward members been consulted?  Yes  No

105 Partner organisations referred to in this report have been consulted to provide relevant and up to date information about the projects, initiatives and services referenced.

**What are the resource implications?**

106 All of the projects and services referred to in this report are being undertaken within current budgets, there are no additional resource implications arising from this report.

**What are the key risks and how are they being managed?**

107 A corporate risk has been identified on Escalating Poverty. Further details of the risk can be seen in the Annual Corporate Risk Report to be reported at this meeting.

**What are the legal implications?**

108 There are no specific legal implications or access to information issues with this report.

**Options, timescales and measuring success**

**What other options were considered?**

109 No other options have been considered.

**How will success be measured?**

110 Success will be measured via update reports.

**What is the timetable and who will be responsible for implementation?**

111 Implementation will be immediate.

**Appendices**

- Leeds Money Information Centre leaflets

**Background papers**

- There are no background papers to this report