



ADUR & WORTHING
COUNCILS

Joint Strategic Committee
11 July 2023

Key Decision [No]

Ward(s) Affected: All Adur and Worthing
Cabinet Portfolio: Worthing Member for
Citizen Services and Housing; Adur
Member for Adur Homes and Customer
Services

Proactive working with residents in Adur and Worthing: an update

Report by the Director for Housing and Communities

Officer Contact Details

Tina Favier, Director for Housing and Communities,
Tina.Favier@adur-worthing.gov.uk

Executive Summary

1. Purpose

- 1.1. In February 2021 this Committee received the report, Covid Benefit Measures impact on vulnerable residents, detailing how the Councils would develop proactive interventions to address issues arising from the Covid-19 pandemic and the cost of living crisis. This report set out how the Councils would work with Policy in Practice and its Low Income Family Tracker (LIFT) platform to use data to identify and target interventions. This is the latest progress and update report.
- 1.2. Proactive has been developed to describe a way of working which uses data to target interventions aimed at reducing vulnerability and enhancing resilience. This work is core to the delivery of our mission to enable more people to thrive, focusing on enabling residents to be healthy, resilient and resourceful, to access the right help when they need it and to ensure that everyone has access to a home and the help they need to sustain their tenancy.
- 1.3. Proactive is about more than just the data. We will work to redesign front line services to respond to the evidence we are

seeing of the benefits of working in a more proactive way. It is focused on hardwiring a more proactive approach into how officers collect income and recover debt, ensuring that this is aligned to the new corporate debt policy, which is premised on being fair, consistent and sensitive to people's needs. We are also designing more capacity into our teams to enable us to become more proactive in our approach to residents that need help and support early, to enable them to manage and become more resilient. Working alongside our community partners, officers will continue to develop the cost of living working within our neighbourhoods and places, building strong community capacity to ensure that communities have what they need to help each other during difficult times.

- 1.4.** The report updates Members about the progress made, the cohorts that have been contacted and the impact to date. It shares information about TellJO - an online wellbeing assessment tool - and how officers have been using this with some early cohorts. Members are also updated on our broader work to implement our income recovery approaches.
- 1.5.** Members are asked to note that the next phase for Proactive will require the implementation of the new leadership structure to be in place. In the interim, the report sets out the use of the Shared Prosperity Fund and Homelessness Prevention Grant to support much needed capacity for this work.
- 1.6.** Finally, Members are asked to note that Proactive is connected to the work of the Councils through the respective Cost of Living road maps, working with communities and partners across Adur and Worthing and within local neighbourhoods.

2. Recommendation

Members of the Joint Committee are asked to:

- 2.1** Note the contents of the report and progress made by Proactive
- 2.2** Support the refocusing of this work as set out in relation to outcomes focused on alleviating housing front door pressures (Paragraph 5.12)

- 2.3** Approve the next steps for this work, including confirming the breakdown for the allocation of the Shared Prosperity Fund for Proactive during 2023/4 and 2024/25, as set out in paragraphs 5.10-5.14)
- 2.4** Note the governance for this work sits with the respective Adur Cabinet Member for Adur Homes and Customer Services and the Worthing Cabinet Member for Housing and Citizen Services
- 2.5** To approve a budget virement to create a programme of work for Proactive as set out in this report, funded from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, as follows:
- i) £141,480 for 2023/24:
- Adur £59,480
 - Worthing £82,000
- ii) £658,250 for 2024/25 (noting this is the committed Proactive and Cost of Living allocation):
- Adur £340,520
 - Worthing £318,000

3. Context

Background context

- 3.1 The enduring impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and the cost of living continue to have a profound effect on many people within our communities, particularly people living on low incomes, and especially for some groups, including carers, families, single people, disabled people and minority ethnic groups.
- 3.2 The Joseph Rowntree Foundation's cost of living tracker (conducted in October 2022) found that the cost of living crisis is having a wide-ranging effect on poorer households, with around six in ten low-income households not being able to afford an unexpected expense, over half being in rent arrears and around a quarter using credit to pay essential bills. It also found that low-income families are struggling to afford essentials such as:

- half of the poorest fifth of families say they have reduced spending on food for adults
- around four in ten families with children are spending less on food for their children
- half are already reducing the number of showers they take
- around six in ten are heating their home less
- over seven in ten families are going without essentials.

3.3 The Institute for Fiscal Studies (June 2023) has recently identified the impact of interest rate rises on low income families, young people and families with large mortgage burdens and renters when landlords start to pass on rising costs.

3.4 Whilst overall levels of vulnerability in Adur and Worthing are generally lower overall than the national average, there are significant inequalities between wards (see 4.5). For Adur and Worthing the overall data shows:

- 4,477 / 12.2% (A) and 8,257 / 12.5% (W) are claiming Universal Credit (the replacement legacy benefit for new benefit claimants) (the national average is 14.8%)
- 2,511 / 6.8% (A) and 4,805 / 7.3% (W) people are claiming Working Age Workless Benefits (national average of 7.9% for both areas);
- 17% (A) and 16% (W) of children are living in relatively low income households (national average is 20% for both areas);
- 1,416 / 9.3% (A) and 2,326 / 9.3% (W) are claiming Pension Credit (national average 11.3% for both areas);
- 2,667 / 7.2% (A) and 4,606 / 7.0% (W) are claiming Personal Independence Payments (PIP) (national average of 7.7% for both areas).

(Numbers reference people, A = Adur, W= Worthing)

3.5 The Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) examines 7 domains of possible deprivation and identifies Adur and Worthing as generally having lower levels of deprivation. There are exceptions of course at a household and local level. Five wards in Worthing and three wards in Adur have been identified as having particular challenges and therefore are likely to be more vulnerable at this time. In Adur the wards are Churchill and to a lesser extent Peverel and Eastbrook and in Worthing the wards are Central, Heene, Northbrook, Broadwater and Castle. In terms of income levels, many households in these wards are amongst the 20% most deprived wards in the country.

3.6 With regard to Universal Credit, the Department for Work and Pensions has confirmed that for Adur and Worthing, the length of time on Universal Credit has a significant impact on the cost of living. In Adur and Worthing, of the 2,926 people claiming Universal Credit (UC) and seeking employment, over 900 have been on UC for over 3 years (this could correlate with those claiming Personal Independence Payments). We know that long-term unemployment is hugely problematic in terms of tackling inequalities.

3.7 Our most recent report from Citizens Advice for the 4th quarter of 2022-2023 presents a worrying picture when compared to the same period in the previous year:

In Worthing there has been a:

- 45% increase in the number of issues and clients presenting with benefit issues
- 25% increase in the number of Universal Credit issues
- 80% increase in the number of utilities and communications issues

In Adur:

- The number of benefit and Tax Credit issues has more than doubled
- There has been a 162% increase in the number of debt issues
- 17% more men are coming to us for financial services help

3.8 The impact of this on our communities and services is profound, particularly in relation to rising homelessness and insecurity around housing. This is evident in the increase in the number of households presenting to the Councils requiring assistance to sustain their current accommodation to prevent homelessness or assistance to find an alternative place to live when they have become homeless.

3.9 In 2022-23, 704 households presented to Adur & Worthing Councils when they were at risk of homelessness or already homeless and were owed a statutory duty to assess their housing needs with the aim of resolving their housing issues. A further 662 households approached both Councils for basic housing advice and signposting to other services for a range of support issues, such as benefits and welfare advice and referral to food banks.

3.10 Although the main causes of homelessness have remained consistent over the last three years - end of private sector tenancy and family/friends eviction

- these are a consequence of households struggling with the cost of living, either unable to keep up with rent payments and falling into arrears, or family and friends unable to sustain the additional costs of having extra people living with them, and due to increasing rents, then being unable to secure their own accommodation. The number of people homeless as a result of family/friends eviction provides an insight into the level of hidden homelessness in the area, adding further pressures to local services when these insecure arrangements break down. What we are not yet seeing in the homelessness data is the impact of rising mortgage rates which is very likely to result in an increase in repossessions as households continue to struggle to meet their mortgage payments.

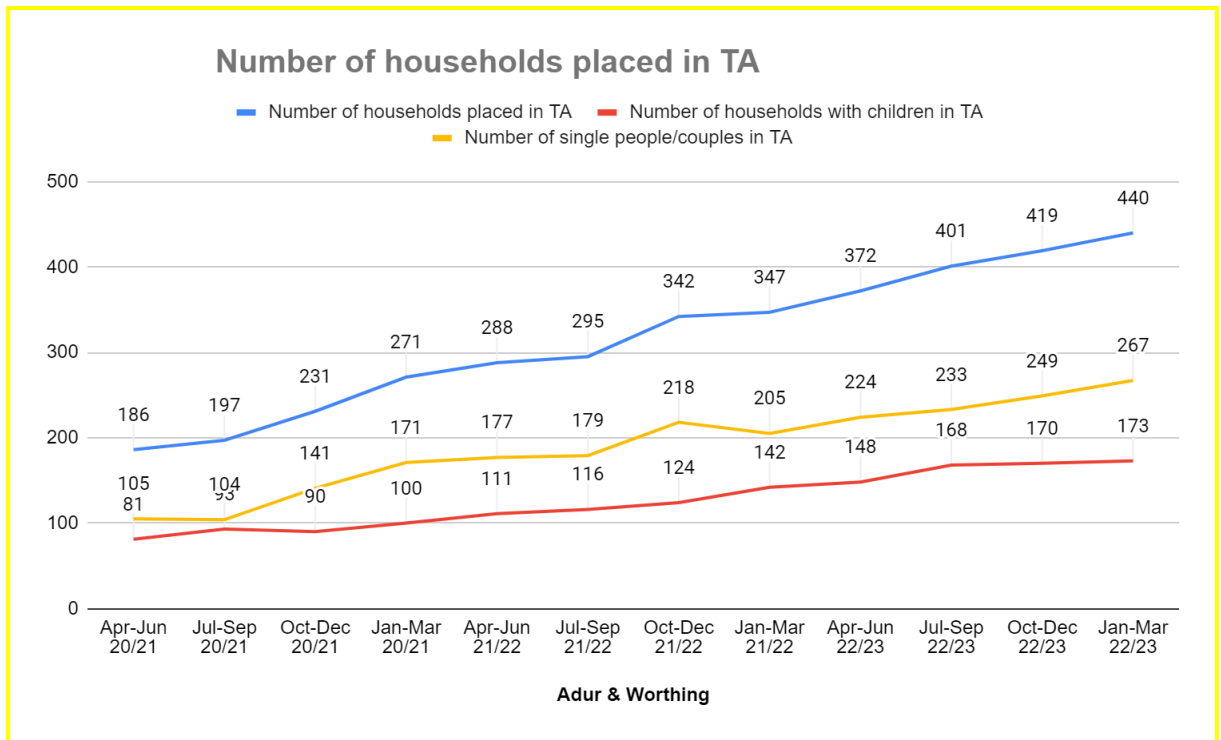
ADUR & WORTHING	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Family/friends will no longer accommodate	174	204	177
End of AST / private sector tenancy	121	218	218

3.11 The level of need for assistance with housing issues in the area is particularly evident in the rising number of households placed in temporary accommodation (TA) by both Councils. This need is at its most acute where we are seeing an increasing number of children placed in TA, sometimes in bed & breakfasts and out of the Adur and Worthing area due to the rising demand for temporary housing and the lack of supply locally. While every effort is made to place households with children in local temporary accommodation, or in adjacent boroughs, this is increasingly difficult to do, placing a further pressure on families who are having to move away from their employment, family and support network, and for children this can mean a change of school or a long journey each day to get to school.

3.12 As at 21st June 2023, for Adur and Worthing the following households are placed in temporary accommodation:

- 428 households (singles, couples and households with children) of which
- 152 are households with children
- 74 are households with children placed in TA out of area
- 13 of the households with children in out of area TA are placed outside of West Sussex.
- 276 single person or couples without children

3.13 The figures for the number of households placed in temporary accommodation over the last three years provide a stark indicator of the increasing need for housing assistance since 2020.



3.14 Another indicator of rising levels of housing-related issues is the number of people applying to the housing registers of both Adur and Worthing. In June 2022 there were 740 (Adur) and 1421 (Worthing) live housing register cases. These figures have increased to 939 (Adur) and 1790 (Worthing) live cases, an increase of 26% in one year in the number of households with an active housing register application.

Cost of Living programme

3.15 Members are reminded that the Cost of Living Roadmaps, as reported previously to this Committee, have been agreed by each Council, setting out how stakeholders in the district and borough can collectively assist and enable people in need. The role of the Councils is to facilitate action within communities, involving community partners, focusing on:

1. Coordinating an urgent response to the cost of living emergency through helping to meet short-term need
2. Developing a sustained and co-ordinated community response to ensure that residents who are vulnerable and most at risk of

experiencing financial exclusion are able to achieve better financial wellbeing and resilience

3. Considering the Councils' own organisational cultures, policies and practices to ensure they addresses the cost of living crisis
4. Ensuring partners in Adur & Worthing work collaboratively to better utilise resources to meet community needs and promote financial wellbeing and resilience.

- 3.16 This action is ultimately focused on developing a safety net for those households facing the most severe impacts, focusing on sustainable measures for addressing underlying issues, for example financial exclusion, debt management, a food plan, and reducing people's energy use.

Proactive - the model and approach

- 3.17 The Proactive work relates to the work that the Councils are doing internally to refocus some of our key front line services to address vulnerability. Proactive uses data to identify, target, support and enable residents on low incomes to mitigate the impacts of the cost of living pressures, helping people to maximise their incomes and to be signposted for help and support. Four teams: Customer Services, Community Capacity and Resilience (formally Communities and Wellbeing). Revenues and Benefits, and Housing, with the support of the Digital Team, work together on this programme, under the leadership of the Director for Housing and Communities. (Appendix 1 has a diagram that seeks to describe the Proactive model and its relationship with the cost of living work)
- 3.18 Officers have been working with the award-winning Policy in Practice team, using its Low Income Family Tracker "LIFT" to carry out predictive data analysis and modelling via the use of our datasets held within the Revenues and Benefits Team (see below). In addition, officers also secured other tools such as TellJO (an online wellbeing tool) and an online budgeting tool, which are both described in Appendix 2.
- 3.19 The objective is to use data, technology and officers to create and develop the capacity and approaches to proactively identify and reach out to those experiencing vulnerability. Using person-centred approaches (in person and digitally) the purpose is to inform, support and signpost residents to help and support, enabling people to sustainably (and where possible do this themselves) manage, be more resilient and improve their wellbeing.

3.20 The design principles at the heart of Proactive include:

- Being data and evidence driven to focus on people experiencing vulnerability (in all its forms)
- Focusing on prevention and early help
- Being person-centred, strength-based and trauma-informed.
- Ensuring inclusivity in the approach, with participation of users built into the approach
- Balancing digital tools and people-based support, recognising some people are digitally disadvantaged
- Integrating the approach across teams, focused on data sharing, collaboration and learning

3.21 A simple 5-step pathway (see graphic below) describes how officers identify and provide this support to residents that (our data tells us) are experiencing financial hardship:

Step One Identify ->	Step Two engage ->	Step Three support ->	Step Four direct ->	Step Five review ->
Extract the group from the data set	Proactively contact residents	Discuss options and support	Where needed, refer for further inhouse or external support	Measure the impact of these interventions

Proactive utilises a number of resources and tools and for ease these have been described and provided in Appendix 2

4. Development of Proactive

4.1 A short three-month pilot in April - June 2022 brought together a temporary Proactive team (as described in the July 2022 report to this Committee). Sponsored by our senior leadership team this included dedicated management, some additional front line resources (working alongside our existing teams) and created a team to review cases and develop policy changes. This work was additional to the 5-step pathway, focusing on driving a case review process for those on the Proactive case list and also on broader policy changes (see below).

4.2 This was concluded in June 2022 and lessons from this were collated and built into the overall programme. A number of key issues have been learned and used to inform Proactive, including the need for capacity and resources and the need for the development of a casework model and learning to

change and adapt the way each of the respective teams work together on this mission.

- 4.3 Since this pilot ended, the Customer Services team have been continuing Proactive as the 5-step model approach, identifying cohorts of residents through LIFT and making proactive calls as part of their core business (in between reactive work). The Community Capacity and Resilience Team have continued their work through OneStop (see below). Whilst the pathway model has remained in place throughout, it has been supported from within available resources (i.e. alongside day-to-day work) and the teams' ability to do this work has varied from month to month, depending on the level of reactive demand coming into the Councils.
- 4.4 It should also be noted that the ongoing effects of Covid-19 and the cost of living has resulted in an exponential rise in demand on our services along with a complexity of issues that our residents are experiencing. This has impacted the Customer Service team's ability to move away from reactive responses and into proactive work. It also means that the routes into support and help are already stretched and therefore signposting to help can often be challenging. This is against a backdrop of ongoing fiscal challenges and workforce recruitment issues, which have resulted in a reduction in team numbers and difficulties around recruitment and retainment of suitably qualified and experienced staff in all of these teams.
- 4.5 In terms of being able to scale up this work for people that are more digitally able, there has been a focus on how officers can begin to use technology to enable people to self help and be self directed to support. TellJO as an online digital wellbeing tool has been used with specific cohorts of residents, which include those who have registered for housing or homelessness advice, those suspended on the housing register for arrears, people served a notice for arrears and those on UC, the results of which are described below.

Household Support Fund

- 4.6 The Household Support Fund (HSF) has been allocated to county councils over the last few years (through four rounds) for the purposes of supporting vulnerable households in need, arising from the cost of living. For Round 4, data from the LIFT platform has been used to develop a proposal for the Adur & Worthing Councils' to secure funding from West Sussex County Council (WSCC) for our residents. WSCC has agreed to allocate £221,850 to distribute to 1,748 households who will miss out on the £900 Government cost of living support in 2023. This will additionally target 142 households who are

entitled to Pension Credit but not claiming this. By offering HSF in this way, residents can also be assisted in completing a Pension Credit application form, if support is needed.

- 4.7 In addition another proposal is being drawn up to apply to WSCC for HSF for the purposes of preventing homelessness and supporting people to sustain their tenancies.

Corporate Debt Policy Work

- 4.8 Finally, Proactive is about the approach taken to collect income and recover debt and Members will recall a report was taken to Adur and Worthing Joint Strategic Committee to approve a new Corporate Debt Recovery Policy. Officers have started to run workshops with teams to co-design new ways of working that are more aligned with the principles and actions set out within this policy. This is aimed at ensuring that our practice is fair, consistent and sensitive to reflect our Proactive ambitions.

Issues for consideration

- 4.9 This section details the results of the work that has been undertaken over the last year since the last report to Members.

Proactive call results

- 4.10 Since July 2022, the team has identified and attempted to contact by phone a further 265 residents. Contact was made in 60% of cases overall, and 105 were happy to work with the team, providing a “fully engaged” rate of 39.6%. The groups that the team has been working with in the last eleven months are provided in Appendix 3.
- 4.11 Customer Service Advisers continue to make all outbound calls and are able to resolve approximately three quarters of resident needs at first point of contact. Advisers continue to provide assistance by signposting residents to benefits, assisting them to complete application forms, and advising them of other financial and wellbeing help available e.g. Southern Water support schemes etc. Customer Services continues to refer residents to other teams when needed and the top four reasons for referrals remain unchanged:
- Referrals to OneStop for long-term financial advice and support
 - Referrals to Wellbeing for support with isolation and loneliness
 - Referrals to Council Tax Recovery for complex arrears arrangements
 - Referrals to Adur Homes to discuss rent arrears.

Financial Impacts on Work with Engaged Residents

- 4.12 It takes time for financial impacts to be seen and in the last report to this committee we had reported on those for cohorts 11-17. We include below our analysis of the impact on cohorts 18-24 (for cohorts 25-27, not enough time has elapsed between our speaking with a resident in order for them to apply for benefits or be referred to external agencies).

In all cases, officers measure the change in income at initial contact and 6 months after that initial contact.

See Appendix 3 for more details on cohorts.

(**Adur** in bold type, *Worthing* in Italics)

Cohort	Average change in monthly take home income	Average change in monthly income after ONS defined bills paid	Average change in total arrears (council tax and Adur Homes rent if applicable)
18	<i>Worthing</i> £0	-£52	£0
19	Closed before being actioned		
20	Adur +£363	+£202	+£77
21	Adur +£546 <i>Worthing +£290</i>	+£108 <i>+£168</i>	£0 <i>+£35</i>
22	Adur +£167 <i>Worthing +£37</i>	+£24 <i>+£95</i>	+£31 +£11
23	<i>Worthing +£701</i>	+£261	£0
24	Adur Homes TellJO cohort		

- 4.13 All of the cohorts have seen an average increase in both take home income and income after ONS defined bills have been paid apart from cohort 18 but this was a single case rather than a large cohort. This increase has not led to a reduction in arrears but with inflation having been at over 10% for much of the past year even with increases in income this is only helping to prevent arrears increasing even further.
- 4.14 As part of cohort 14 from above, the Customer Service team carried out a pension credit take up campaign, which resulted in the Councils bringing in £267,900 into 66 households (20 Adur and 46 Worthing) to increase their

income and help protect them during these uncertain times. This was for Pension Credit moving forward for the year, backdated amounts and their entitlement to the 2022 and 2023 Cost of Living payments. Looking at this over the likely lifetime of their claims, that's over £1.5m extra into these households' finances. Some broken down figures below:

- Pension Credit annual amount moving forward - £146,248
- Backdated Pension Credit - £33,002
- Cost of living 2022 and 2023 payments - £88,650

Broader impacts of Proactive

4.15 In terms of the impacts on wellbeing of working with Customer Services, this has been collated by officers holding more open conversation with residents to gather their feedback on their experience of receiving proactive contact. Residents are also asked about their views with regard to future contact and whether their perceptions of the Councils have changed as a result of being contacted. Some recent example of this type of feedback is below:

- 25-year-old Worthing Homes tenant: "I don't want to suggest any changes to your process. I did really appreciate the Council reaching out to me, and it has provided me with a much more positive experience. Getting Council Tax Support has reduced my council tax by £40 per month. Talking to you encouraged me to also tell the Council about a noise problem and gave me the confidence to go into mediation with my neighbour. The noise has reduced and we are getting on better."
- 40-year-old single male in Adur: "My wellbeing has improved as a result of being in touch with the Council on this proactive basis. What I have found helpful is the rapport/relationship with an individual adviser. Having helped me with my housing situation, it had a knock-on positive effect on a lot of other issues."
- Single private tenant claiming disability benefit and in the "struggling" financial category: "I appreciate the calls from you because I am able to offload what life throws at me, and it helps me cope."

TellJO results

4.16 Since the launch of TellJO at the end of 2022, officers have completed these cohorts with the results detailed in Appendix 4. TellJO is an important tool for Proactive, enabling the Councils to use data to target larger cohorts and enable people to self-assess their financial position and wellbeing and to be directed to help and support and back to the Councils for further assistance.

Members were provided with a briefing earlier this year to demonstrate how this technology works.

OneStop

- 4.17 OneStop supports households who are experiencing financial hardship, those who are struggling with the cost of living or those who face significant debt or long-term financial difficulties. The service also has a skills & employment strand working to support those who face barriers in accessing employment opportunities and who are furthest away from the labour market. We also commission a youth hub funded by the Department for Work and Pensions which is hosted in the voluntary and community sector. This work is highly specialised and requires an ability to handhold residents that often experience a high level of mistrust in statutory services.

Snapshot data over the past 2 years shows that we have worked with 1,424 of the most vulnerable and complex residents within our Money Support work strand across Adur and Worthing, supporting 434 residents furthest from the labour market through our Journey to Work programme and have worked with 186 on our Rough Sleeper Initiative, with 59 being supported into paid employment since the scheme began. Within our Money Support service, our residents have been supported to maximise their household income to a total value of more than £2 million.

Case Studies

Joe, a 50-year-old man who had been signed off from work due to mental and physical wellbeing, was in receipt of statutory sick pay at the point of being referred. He was unaware of what he was able to claim or how to progress and move forward. We worked with Joe intensively, supporting him with his welfare benefit applications to avoid further financial hardship.

Feedback from Customer: “Thanks for your help in this as I was struggling to find the help you gave me elsewhere. Many thanks, Joe”

At the point of being referred to our service, Samantha had stage 3 cancer and her partner was off of work as he had fractured his hip. They had applied for Universal Credit and Personal Independence Payments but had not heard anything in relation to their claim. Their situation had become dire due to having no income at all and were struggling to get support. Following our assessment we advised them that we would escalate the situation on their behalf and as such their applications were fast-tracked, which helped them reduce their deductions. In addition we applied for a Household Support

Fund payment, which was secured to the value of £700. We are still supporting Samatha and her partner.

Feedback from Customer: “Thank you for letting me know and for all your support at this difficult time. I really do appreciate your help. Kind regards Samantha.”

Next Steps: Proactive 2.0 - A focus on the Housing front door

- 4.18 The next phase for Proactive will be dependent on implementing the new leadership structure within the Communities Directorate, to provide the leadership and management capacity to further develop and operationalise this work. This is expected to be in place by Autumn 2023.
- 4.19 Proactive in the meantime continues to operate (as set out within this report) through a multidisciplinary team (including the aforementioned teams), chaired by the Director for Housing and Communities, focusing on two strands of (connected) work:
1. Policy and practice - Rewiring the way we collect income - aligned to our debt policy - helping those that can't or struggle to pay
 2. Proactive outreach - Interventions targeted at people who might or who are experiencing vulnerability.
- 4.20 There is a need for Proactive to be more focused in terms of its outcomes. Given the challenges around supporting our housing front doors and managing the demands of homelessness, it is proposed that Proactive is focused on housing and reducing debt and maximising income for the purposes of:
- a. Preventing homelessness
 - b. Enabling people to sustain their tenancies
 - c. Enabling people to move on and resettle into more stable housing.
- 4.21 Members agreed to prioritise a significant proportion of the Shared Prosperity Fund allocated to both Councils to support Proactive in 2023/24 and 2024/25. Alongside this, officers are also working on plans to utilise the Homelessness Prevention Grant to focus more on prevention work for housing. Both of these external funds will be critical to Proactive and the funding breakdown for this is set out below in section 7.0.
- 4.22 Work is now being shaped in two phases (recognising the points raised in paragraph 5.10 around leadership capacity):

1. Phase one will be used to fund the key technology and caseworker support for Proactive including (detailed below in section 7):
 - a. The annual licence for the LIFT platform for 2023/4 and 2024/25
 - b. The annual licence for the Tell Jo Platform for 2023/4 and 2024/25
 - c. 3 FTE Proactive Caseworkers (assuming these start in Autumn 23 until March 2025): 1 FTE for Adur and 2 FTEs for Worthing. Note the difference in capacity relates to the different levels of demand across Adur and Worthing around homelessness (around 70% / 30% for Worthing/Adur).

In addition to this, data capacity is also being secured to assist with this work in our Housing Teams, which is being funded through Homelessness Prevention Grants.

2. Phase two will be implemented from the Autumn 2023 following the instalment of the new leadership structure, which will develop the operational leadership and management required to develop and support the development of Proactive in the remainder of 2023/4 and 2024/25, aligned to the cost of living programme which is being developed in our communities and neighbourhoods.

Proactive Developments in the Interim Period.

- 4.23 The Customer Service team aims to have all advisers trained and comfortable to make proactive calls by the end of the current financial year. This will enable the team to flex more effectively between reactive and proactive work. A number of Council digitisation projects are starting that aim to reduce or remove some transactional demand by allowing residents to self-serve online. If that reduced reactive demand goal is realised, then customer service advisers will be able to switch to the more complex calls (incoming and outgoing) for residents who are experiencing vulnerability and for those who are unable or unwilling to use digital solutions.
- 4.24 It is however worth emphasising that whilst reactive demand for transactional and non-complex help may well decrease as self service options are implemented, the team has seen a steady increase in incoming calls from residents wanting help and advice with housing and/or benefits and/or arrears. We have also seen that the length of our calls in those areas has increased over each of the last 4 years. This is as expected given the impacts of the pandemic and then the cost of living challenge, which have impacted on residents across the local and national community.

Average call length (call + wrap) in minutes		
	Pre-pandemic April 2019	Current April 2023
Housing	6.4	11.1
Revenues	9.9	15
Benefits	11.9	13.8

4.25 A number of new cohorts will be programmed into Proactive, subject to approval, focusing on developing a set of outcome measures around our housing front door and the three outcomes.

Proactive working with external partners

4.26 Through the cost of living approaches, the Proactive and OneStop service was made aware by Southern Water that 7,760 residents were eligible to be moved onto a social tariff which would significantly reduce the cost of their water bills. Southern Water was unable to access the granular level data to identify those customers at a household level and approached the Councils for assistance. Utilising data through LIFT officers were able to identify the households and inform them about their eligibility for the tariff and that they could save money. The OneStop team used TellJO to enable residents facing other socio-economic difficulties to access a wider range of support.

4.27 WSCC is now also purchasing LIFT, and our Councils along with Chichester and Horsham (who also use LIFT) are working within a new Memorandum of Understanding to enable Policy in Practice to share the aggregated data between the Councils for the purposes of:

- Enabling greater partnership across the Councils and voluntary sector to determine geographical locations and certain demographics that are more vulnerable to hardship, exclusion and inequalities
- Providing supporting information for collective strategic prioritisation
- Providing supportive data from which to target internal resources to maximise benefits to residents
- Supporting the central WSCC Intelligence and Performance Team who provide a corporate service across WSCC

(Note that WSCC will not hold any individual data)

- 4.28 The updated Debt Recovery Policy was agreed in November 2022 and officers are now working to put in place changes to our processes to make sure that the Councils are meeting the aims and ambitions of the policy. We want this work to be co-designed with input from front line staff in the different teams involved in debt recovery. The overall process is:
- Survey staff members involved in debt recovery for their views on what they would like to change
 - Hold a series of workshops with relevant teams, including representatives from the service, customer services and OneStop
 - Develop recommendations and decisions to be shared with Directors
 - Implement changes and monitor impact

The teams are focusing on Council Tax and Housing Benefit overpayments initially, followed by Housing and Parking teams.

Data and LIFT

- 4.29 Members are reminded that the households in LIFT are those receiving Housing Benefit, Council Tax Reduction (CTR) and those in receipt of Universal Credit and CTR. Those households on Universal Credit and not getting any Council Tax Reduction are not in these data sets. Discussions continue between local authorities (LAs) and the Department for Work and Pensions with an aim to make these households available in the future. A letter is being sent to the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), countersigned by LAs in the summer of 2023 and the DWP appears open to discussion and working with LAs around making these households data available in the future.
- 4.30 It should also be noted that there are currently discussions with the DWP about data sharing and the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) that is in place. As it currently stands, local councils are working directly with the DWP to ensure full compliance. DWP has confirmed in writing that the sharing of data which enables Policy in Practice to create the Low Income Family Tracker dashboard for LAs to use around benefit take-up, wrap-around support and prevention work streams is compliant with the MoU, as long as a DWP re-use form has been sent off, which Adur & Worthing Councils have completed and emailed to DWP.

5.0 Engagement and Communication

- 5.1 The Proactive team has engaged internally and with partners including Age UK, Arun District Council, Boom Credit Union, CAP UK, Citizens Advice (Arun & Chichester and West Sussex), Community Works, DWP, Southern Water, West Sussex County Council and Worthing Homes.
- 5.2 The team continues to engage and meet with other authorities who work in a proactive way and has benefited from meetings to share ideas and lessons learned with Sussex and Kent-based authorities. The team is also part of a network group facilitated by Policy in Practice that allows it access to UK-wide authorities.
- 5.3 Proactive also ensures - as set out in the paper - that resident feedback is used to continue to improve and shape the service.

6.0 Financial Implications

- 6.1 The Councils have been allocated £234,620 for 2023/24 from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (Adur £96,990, Worthing £137,630). For 2024/25 there is a further allocation of £1,648,080 (Adur £854,520, Worthing £793,560).
- 6.2 Funding from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) of £141,480 has been allocated to Proactive for 2023/24 (Adur = £59,480; Worthing = £82,000) which will be used as follows:

Year 2 - 2023/24			
Descriptor	Adur	Worthing	Total
TellJO	£21,100	£25,410	£46,510
Benefits Calculator	£1,470	£1,470	£2,940
LIFT	£16,380	£16,380	£32,760
Proactive Caseworkers: 1 FTE Adur 2 X FTE Worthing (6 months, inc on costs)	£19,340	£38,670	£58,010
Total committed	£58,290	£81,930	£140,220
Budget Remaining*	£1,190	£70	£1,260

- 6.3 A budget from the 2024/25 UKSPF of £658,520 has been allocated to the Cost of Living and Proactive work. (Adur = £340,520, Worthing = £318,000). Of this total, £203,450 will be allocated to fund the work as set out in the table below for year 3. A proposal will be developed for the remainder of this

budget, with the new Head of Resident Services and the Head of Community Capacity and Resilience, in consultation with the appropriate Members.

Year 3			
Descriptor	Adur	Worthing	Total
TelJO	£21,100	£25,410	£46,510
Benefits Calculator	£1,470	£1,470	£2,940
LIFT	£16,380	£16,380	£32,760
Proactive Caseworkers: 1 FTE Adur 2 X FTE Worthing (inc on costs and factoring in a 4.5% pay award)	£40,410	£80,830	£121,240
Total committed	£79,360	£124,090	£203,450
Budget Remaining	£261,160	£193,910	£445,070

Finance Officer: Sarah Gobey

Date:29/6/2023

7.0 Legal Implications

- 7.1 Under Section 111 of the Local Government Act 1972, the Council has the power to do anything that is calculated to facilitate, or which is conducive or incidental to, the discharge of any of their functions.
- 7.2 s1 of the Localism Act 2011 empowers the Council to do anything an individual can do apart from that which is specifically prohibited by pre-existing legislation
- 7.3 Section 3(1) of the Local Government Act 1999 (LGA 1999) contains a general duty on a best value authority to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy ,efficiency and effectiveness
- 7.4 The grant funding must be spent in accordance with the terms and conditions upon which it is granted, and all expenditure from that funding is to be spent in accordance with the respective Council's Contract Standing Orders and must not create any unlawful state subsidy in respect of any commercial undertaking.

Background Papers

- [Covid Benefit Measures impact on vulnerable residents, February 2021](#)
- Corporate Debt Policy and Supporting the Most Vulnerable - [Adur](#)
- Corporate Debt Policy and Supporting the Most Vulnerable - [Worthing](#)
- [Household Support Fund proposal](#)

Sustainability & Risk Assessment

1. Economic

The aim of the Proactive Team's work is to increase household income and/or reduce household debt via targeted support to low income residents. Achieving those aims will enable the economic participation of a wider proportion of our communities and will help sustain the local area's recovery post the pandemic.

2. Social

2.1 Social Value

The work potentially reduces financial exclusion and improves financial inclusion. National analysis of the impacts of the pandemic shows that certain groups have been disproportionately impacted e.g. over 50s, younger people, and women and this work will allow us to offer support to a range of groups.

2.2 Equality Issues

The Proactive team completed its first full equality impact assessment in July 2021, and proposes to review that regularly. Due to the potential scale, breadth and scope of interventions, the project team is likely to encounter a range of impacts on access and participation and will need to respond in the light of resident feedback encountered. For example, the team is keen to use digital tools to scale up, but is aware that it will need to use non-digital contact methods for those residents who are unable or willing to use digital tools.

2.3 Community Safety Issues (Section 17)

This work will have a positive impact on community safety issues by tackling some of the root causes that can lead to distress and anti-social behaviour in some instances.

2.4 Human Rights Issues

Matter considered and will support human rights through access to financial resources

3. Environmental

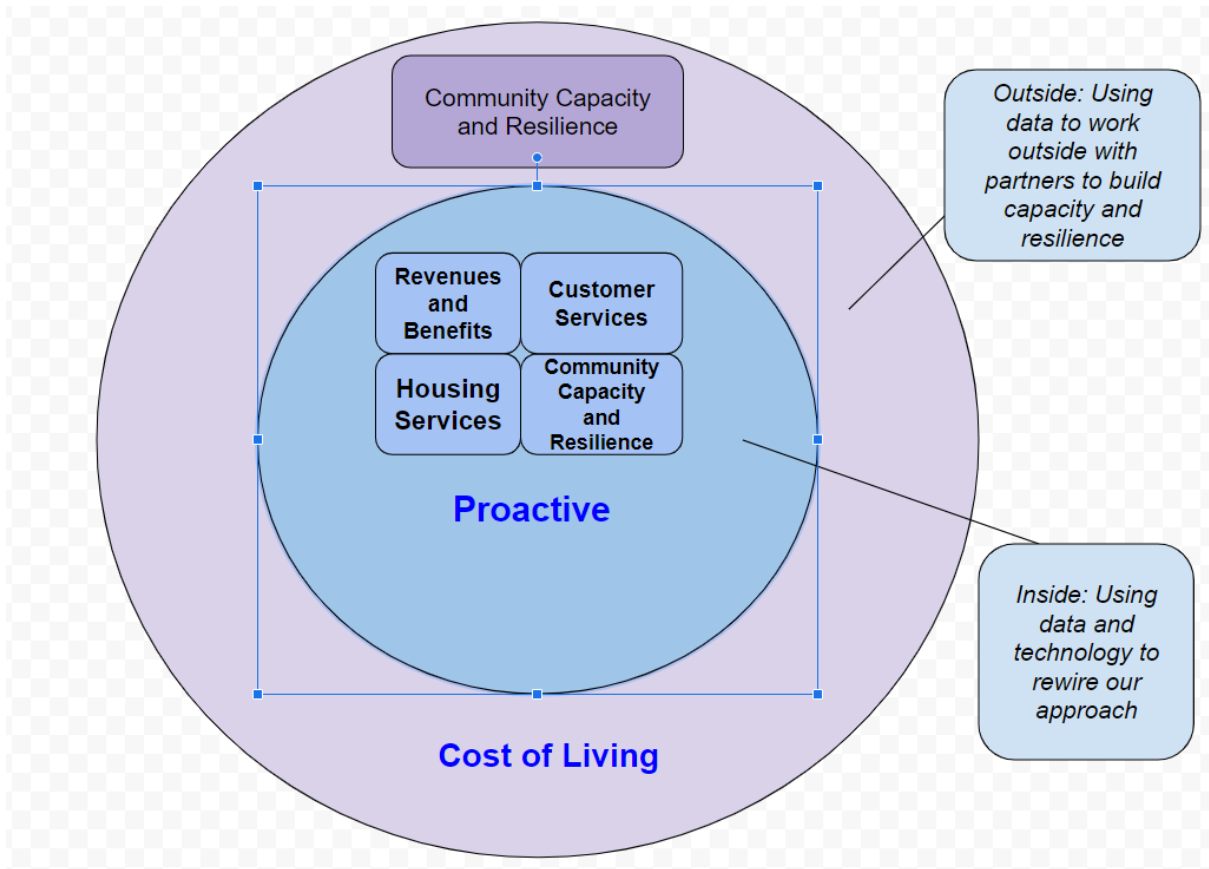
Matter considered and no issues identified

4. Governance

The work is overseen as part of the Councils' Thrive Board and aligns to our Good Services Framework to ensure we deliver a good customer experience and one which makes it as easy as possible for our residents to get what they need.

The work offers the opportunity to work closely with third sector stakeholders, enhancing our reputation as a good partner

Appendix 1: Proactive and the Cost of Living Emergency Work



Appendix 2: Proactive resources and tools

Proactive utilises a number of resources and tools and for ease these are described below:

Tool/Team	How it works
Low-Income Family Tracker (LIFT)	<p>This utilises existing datasets (Revenues and Benefits) to provide a financial risk score for each resident in the dashboard. This is used to review known household income and anticipated household costs (using Office for National Statistics data about typical household spend for particular household types and sizes) to create one of four financial risk scores:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Coping: household income exceeds expected costs by £100+ pcm. ○ Struggling: household income exceeds costs by £0-100 pcm ○ At risk: household income is less than expected costs. ○ In crisis: household income insufficient for housing. <p>Groups of individuals can then be targeted for support.</p> <p>Those households on Universal Credit and not getting any Council Tax Reduction are not in these datasets, but discussions continue between LAs and the DWP with an aim to make these households available in the future.</p>
TellJO online wellbeing tool	<p>This is a digital wellbeing assessment, empowering people to engage and find support using a mobile phone. This is used to reach out to identified cohorts and directs people to help and support.</p> <p>TellJO works through a text message enabling residents to complete an online assessment (which takes around 7 minutes). It provides 63 indicators of vulnerability to help understand their situation and then it can signpost to relevant advice and support - such as debt advice, water and energy social tariffs and priority registers or support for mental health issues. This is then followed up with a triage call from TellJO, to provide additional support.</p> <p>We can then see a dashboard with the information the resident has consented to share with us, to help us understand more about their situation and complete any follow on work that is needed.</p>
Customer Service Advisors	<p>This team uses LIFT to identify cohorts or people and then provides proactive calls, using a person-centred approach around listening and</p>

	<p>providing advice, support and signposting to other services. The team follows the 5-step pathway shown under paragraph 3 above. Advisers are trained to recognise and respond to residents in person-centred, asset based ways, building relationships often over the course of several conversations whilst people are supported to apply for additional benefits. Approximately 75% of residents are directly supported through advisors with the remaining 25% signposted to inhouse/external teams for additional support.</p>
<p>OneStop</p>	<p>This team provides money advice and support for people, including those identified through Proactive. This team provides:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Crisis support to help resolve the problem that requires urgent attention. ● Early intervention to prevent emerging issues from becoming more serious. <p>This uses a relational and solution-focused approach to build trust and engagement from our residents focused on maximising their income before offering debt advice.</p>
<p>Going Local</p>	<p>This team provides 1-to-1 support for people that might be referred through Proactive to signpost and connect people to a range of social support services and activities in local places to improve wellbeing.</p>
<p>Housing Teams</p>	<p>Housing Needs provides:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Person-centred 1-to-1 support for people needing housing advice, threatened with or experiencing homelessness as well as those in living in temporary accommodation ● Uses TellJO to support income collection as well as providing vital information on health, wellbeing, debt and finances to connect those needing housing advice or experiencing homelessness to the support they need as well as informing the needs of household for their Personalised Housing Plan ● Refers vulnerable households to our joint-funded with WSCC Pathways Homes service for allocation of a support worker ● Works in a multi-disciplinary way with key partners which includes Children's Services, Young Persons and Careleavers team, Adult Services and Criminal Justice, Sussex Partnership NHS Foundation Trust and commissioned services as well as co-located workers - Mental Health Housing Advisor, Independent Domestic Abuse Advisor and Adults Social Worker. <p>Adur Homes provides:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Tenancy management for general needs and sheltered housing tenants, providing person-centred 1-to-1 support as well as referral to appropriate services for tenants who are vulnerable and needing support

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Uses TellJO for those in arrears and those on Universal Credit to support income collection, increase income and connect to support when needed ● Works with Housing Needs for those threatened with eviction, and making referrals for Pathways Homes support when needed
<p>Revenues and Benefits Team</p>	<p>The Revenues & Benefits Team receive referrals from Proactive cohorts via Customer Service and OneStop Money Advice. The team liaise with them to make affordable arrangements for Council Tax arrears, Housing Benefit overpayments, apply for Council Tax Support and Discretionary Housing Payments. The Revenues team negotiates with the OneStop Money Advisors with regard to making reasonable and affordable arrangements for those that have Council Tax arrears.</p>

Appendix 3

a) Description for cohorts 20 - 27 selected for proactive contact June 2022 - May 2023

Adur in bold type, *Worthing* in Italics

		Number in cohort	Number in cohort less incorrect details or change of circumstances	Number contacted	Number engaging	% engaging
20	Adur Homes Residents who are struggling or at risk	28 (Adur 28) <i>Worthing 0)</i>	27 (Adur 27) <i>Worthing 0)</i>	14 (Adur 14) <i>Worthing 0)</i>	12 (Adur 12) <i>Worthing 0)</i>	44.4%
21	Private tenants in both Adur and Worthing who are either a couple, lone parent or couple with children who are struggling or at risk	41 (Adur 14) <i>Worthing 27)</i>	41 (Adur 14) <i>Worthing 27)</i>	22 (Adur 8) <i>Worthing 14)</i>	18 (Adur 6) <i>Worthing 12)</i>	43.9%
22	Private tenants in both Adur and Worthing who are single, claiming a disability and are either struggling or at risk	97 (Adur 31) <i>Worthing 66)</i>	89 (Adur 30) <i>Worthing 59)</i>	52 (Adur 17) <i>Worthing 35)</i>	29 (Adur 11) <i>Worthing 18)</i>	32.6%
23	Ad hoc referral	1 (Adur 0) <i>Worthing 1)</i>	1 (Adur 0) <i>Worthing 1)</i>	1 (Adur 0) <i>Worthing 1)</i>	1 (Adur 0) <i>Worthing 1)</i>	100%
24	Adur Homes tenants in all 4 poverty categories	Adur Homes contacted this cohort				

25	Private tenants in Adur and Worthing who are carers and are struggling or at risk	4 (Adur 3) <i>Worthing 1)</i>	4 (Adur 3) <i>Worthing 1)</i>	2 (Adur 1) <i>Worthing 1)</i>	1 (Adur 0) <i>Worthing 1)</i>	25%
26	Private tenants in Adur who are single and not claiming a disability benefit or carers' discount who are struggling or at risk	60 (Adur 60) <i>Worthing 0)</i>	57 (Adur 57) <i>Worthing 0)</i>	36 (Adur 36) <i>Worthing 0)</i>	26 (Adur 26) <i>Worthing 0)</i>	45.6%
27	Private tenants in Worthing who are single and not claiming a disability benefit or carers discount who are struggling or at risk	205 (Adur 0) <i>Worthing 205)</i>	205 (Adur 0) <i>Worthing 205)</i>	33 (Adur 0) <i>Worthing 33)</i>	23 (Adur 0) <i>Worthing 23)</i>	11.2%*

*Cohort 27 is still actively being contacted so the percentage engaging is not reflective of the final figure that will be engaging

b) Demographic segmentation for residents who engaged with the Proactive team

Adur in bold type, *Worthing* in Italics

Gender	Male: Adur 26 <i>Worthing 26</i> ; Female: Adur 28 <i>Worthing 30</i>
Household type	Couple with children: Adur 4 <i>Worthing 1</i> Couple without children: Adur 1 <i>Worthing 6</i> Lone parent: Adur 4 <i>Worthing 6</i> Single: Adur 45 <i>Worthing 43</i>
Economic status	Not in work: Adur 46 <i>Worthing 47</i> In work: Adur 8 <i>Worthing 9</i>
Ward	Buckingham:1 Churchill:5 Cokeham:7 Eastbrook:1 Hillside:9 Manor:2 Marine:2 Mash Barn:4 Peverel:5 Southlands:5 Southwick Green:3 St Mary's:5 St Nicholas:1 Widewater:4 Broadwater:2 Castle:5 Central:12 Durrington:2 Gaisford:4 Goring:3 Heene:8 Marine:5 Northbrook:4 Salvington:1 Selden:5 Tarring:5
Disability	Disability: Adur 23 <i>Worthing 23</i> Carer: Adur 1 <i>Worthing 1</i>

Financial risk status	Coping: Adur 0 <i>Worthing 6</i> Struggling: Adur 19 <i>Worthing 14</i> At Risk: Adur 35 <i>Worthing 36</i>
Age	18-21: Adur 0 <i>Worthing 1</i> 20-29: Adur 1 <i>Worthing 3</i> 30-39: Adur 6 <i>Worthing 10</i> 40-49: Adur 10 <i>Worthing 12</i> 50-59: Adur 26 <i>Worthing 12</i> 60-69: Adur 9 <i>Worthing 18</i> 70+ Adur 2 <i>Worthing 0</i>

Appendix 4

TellJO results

Cohort one: **All people that have completed a housing advice form (completed by those who are either homeless or at risk of homelessness)**

Objective: To help officers provide initial support and prioritise the most critical cases

Results Tranche 1:

304 cases were referred to Telljo

98 responded

The process enabled cases to be triaged to take account of support needs as well as housing situations e.g. applicants who indicated they were experiencing domestic abuse

It also gave insights into some of the underlying causes to homelessness which will inform future prevention work as well as the level of need in officers casework.

Of those who responded(*results for x1 cohort out of x3 cohorts, results are typical across the x3 cohorts):

94.87% had debt

61.54% choosing heating or food

41.03% unhappy with their landlord

47.44% experiencing suicidal thoughts

35.9% had a change in circumstances leading to a reduced income

25.64% had an addiction

16.67% were experiencing Domestic Abuse

20.51% were bereaved

The process supported the Personalised Housing Plan process by connecting applicants to services they needed:

37.18% referred to water provider

44.87% referred to energy supplier

37.18% consented for a Money Advice Referral

Whilst others after follow up calls were given advice on maximising income e.g. to claim PIP. Having support needs identified in advance of contact enabled the Homeless Officer to tailor conversations supporting a person centred approach and having some immediate needs met via signposting and referrals enabled officers to focus on other areas as well as be aware of support needs.

Cohort two: **Everyone who is currently in Band D on the housing register with housing debts**

Objective: To better understand the root causes of the debt

Results:

77 accounts with arrears sent to TellJO
13 completed the questionnaire whilst 15 started but did not finish.,

92.31% had debt
76% choosing heating or food
69.23% have addictions
69.23% experiencing suicidal thoughts
53.85% were unhappy with their landlord
53.5% had reduced income
46.15% were bereaved
30.77% were experiencing domestic abuse

61.54% referred to Money Advice and Utility network referrals
46.15% referred to a water supplier for reduced tariff

3 households had their housing benefit reinstated after contact with the team with 9 making payment arrangements, 3 of which were maintained.

Mental health, addiction, domestic abuse and bereavement are higher than average for homeless households giving insights into causes and contributory factors to debts accruing. Dissatisfaction with the landlord is not unexpected given all are in temporary accommodation with no choice or control..

Cohort three: Everyone at the NOSP stage of arrears (Notice of seeking possession - the first legal stage for arrears recover) at Adur Homes

Objective: To understand the root causes of the debt

Results: The exercise didn't directly help us understand the root cause in many cases but it did enable a connection with residents who would have otherwise not contacted us and gave insight into their support needs prior to making contact to inform conversations.

- 1) Around **1/5** completed a TellJO. With better data quality (more mobile numbers) we would expect to see that at 1/3
- 2) **15%** are unhappy with their landlord vs **15%** average. Adur Homes matches the TellJO average.
- 3) **3** said they are unhappy with the landlord and expressed issues with mould, damp and repairs.
- 4) **1 in 3** Adur Homes residents who completed a TellJO self-helped through digital signposting
- 5) There is a higher rate of suicidal thoughts for Adur Homes residents (**50%**) vs the TellJO (**40%**) average.
- 6) There is a higher rate of Home Access Concern (**11%**) vs the TellJO average (**6%**)

7) **9 out of 10** have used TellJO to request a payment arrangement on their rent arrears. With an additional resident who on receipt of the TellJO invite, went to Housing to make an arrangement directly.

8) **2/3** have been referred into Debt Advice

9) Food bank use is above the TellJO average (**61% vs 28%**)

10) **2/3** of Adur Homes respondents have a diagnosed mental health condition.

Cohort four: All Adur Homes tenants on UC to remind them to update their journal with their new rent amount

Objective: To provide additional support and signposting

Results:

Neighbourhood Services has been working with TellJO to contact our residents whom we know are claiming Universal Credit (UC) and whose rent and service charges have increased.

Out of the 539 residents contacted:

All **539** were asked to complete their UC journal in the message to facilitate the rent increase:

- **80** Completed a TellJO wellbeing assessment
- **45** Completed a Wellbeing Triage call with TellJO
- **42** confirmed they had updated their UC journal with the details of the housing costs increase
- **12** referrals made into housing maintenance and/or advice
- **84** were referred for support with their utility costs
- **23** Referred to the Worthing Prevention Team for additional support, creating payment plans for rent arrears, benefit checks, and income maximisation
- **49** were sent to UKPN for an Energy PSR entry and **37** were sent to Southern Water to apply for a Social Tariff and add to the PSR

This work with TellJO enables us to reach out to residents in large numbers and provide them with the support they need. It is an opportunity to develop relationships with residents that we may not have contacted before.