



## ADUR & WORTHING COUNCILS

Key Decision: No

Wards Affected: All

### **Proactive interventions to support low income residents**

#### **Report by the Interim Director for Communities**

#### **Executive Summary**

##### **1. Purpose**

- 1.1. In January 2022, the Interim Director for Communities presented a Report titled "Proactive interventions to support low income residents" to the Joint Strategic Committee, following earlier reports in February 2021 and July 2021. The January report described the positive financial impacts established for 164 low income residents who the councils had, between March and November 2021, been working with on a proactive basis in order to strengthen their routes out of low resilience.
- 1.2. Members of the Joint Strategic Committee requested in January 2022 that more detailed Member briefings should be arranged on the "LIFT" (Low Income Family Tracker) dashboard used by the Proactive Project team. These were duly held in March 2022.
- 1.3. Members also requested that a further progress report should be brought to the Joint Strategic Committee in July 2022. This report describes changes in the national and local context since the start of the year and includes information about a further 66 residents that the Proactive team has been able to engage by mid May 2022 (out of a total of a further 294 that we contacted or attempted to contact via phone since our last report).
- 1.4. This report also details progress in moving from an experimental approach to a more embedded programme within the Councils, using the learning from the case review approach detailed at section 5.6, additional digital tools to enable residents to self help, and improved insight into a resident's contact with other council teams.

At section 5.17 we set out how our partnership working on the cost of living is progressing and outline our plans for joint working between the councils and relevant partners.

- 1.5. The primary goal of this work is always person (resident) focused and is to ensure that we target help, support and resources where they are needed most. As highlighted in previous reports, however, the secondary goal of this work is to build teams' capabilities to work collaboratively and in a data-led way. The councils' senior leadership team are reviewing this early example of cross-service working with a view to planning how to scale it to other areas of the councils and how to ensure that other teams benefit from the lessons learned on this piece of work.
- 1.6. It is important to view this proactive work in the context of the wider cost of living work being developed across the Councils and the reactive advice and support that all teams concerned continue to provide reactive help to struggling residents, alongside our partnership working with others in our communities. It is also important to note the significant rising demand from residents needing help with housing. The number of residents in Temporary accommodation has increased from 74 to 86 between January and May in Adur and from 271 to 285 in Worthing within the same period. Whilst this increase may not seem large, demand has increased significantly in the last 1-2 years. Pre covid, these figures were 42 Adur households and 136 Worthing households.
- 1.7. Our Revenues & Benefits and Customer Services team have also been dealing with increasing demand for reactive advice and support, both in general terms and in order to administer specific government support measures to mitigate the cost of living increases. The £150 energy rebate exercise, for example, has provided additional payments to residents and generated significant additional workload for both teams to deal with.
- 1.8. All the proactive work described in this report has been done in addition to addressing rising reactive demand.
- 1.9. This report is "for information" and no specific decisions are requested.

## **2. Recommendations**

2.1. The Joint Strategic Committee is recommended to:

- Note the report
- Request that the Director for Communities reports back in 12 months on progress against the next steps outlined in this paper



### 3 Context

- 3.1 Whilst the course of Covid-19 has changed for the better, the transition from pandemic to endemic is ongoing. The councils continue, therefore, to support and assist residents who are experiencing financial, social and wellbeing difficulties that were prompted or exacerbated by the impacts of coronavirus on our local community. Our aim remains that we provide support where it is most needed, and that we are data-led in targeting support in a person-centred way.
- 3.2 The cost of living has been increasing across the UK since early 2021. In March 2022, inflation reached its highest recorded level since 1992, and consumer prices, as measured by the Consumer Prices Index (CPI) were 7% higher than 12 months previously. By April, they were 9% higher than a year before<sup>1</sup>. An important driver of inflation is energy prices. In the year to March 2022, these had already risen by 28% (domestic gas) and 19% (domestic electricity), due in part to a surge in global demand as pandemic restrictions eased. Since March 2022, Russia's invasion of Ukraine has, in addition to its political and humanitarian impact, had significant economic impacts on the world economy. For the UK, the most likely economic effects will be energy and food prices continuing to rise.
- 3.3 In April 2022, planned changes in taxes and national insurance contributions came into effect: a 1.25% point rise in NICs and freezes to thresholds in income tax. Benefits increased in April by less than the current level of inflation. Government support to counteract those impacts includes: from April, a £150 council tax energy rebate (for those 80% of households who are eligible); from July, increasing the point at which people begin to pay national insurance contributions on their earnings and, from October, a £200 energy bill rebate for all domestic electricity customers. Additional support measures announced on 26 May will take effect from October 2022.
- 3.4 The combination of price driving factors is putting financial pressure on large numbers of households in Adur & Worthing - pressure that is seen in the rest of the UK and globally too. The Office for Budget Responsibility expects household post-tax incomes, adjusted for inflation, to start falling in Q2 2022 and not recover until Q3 2024.<sup>2</sup>
- 3.5 Low income households spend a larger proportion than average on energy and food, so will be more affected by price increases. The Resolution Foundation estimates that an additional 1.3 million people in the UK will fall into absolute poverty in 2023, including 500,000 children.<sup>3</sup>
- 3.6 At a local level, LIFT shows us the changing picture for our communities. It tells us the numbers of residents who are in receipt of council administered benefits (housing

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<sup>1</sup> <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-9428/CBP-9428.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> [https://obr.uk/docs/dlm\\_uploads/CCS0222366764-001\\_OBR-EFO-March-2022\\_Web-Accessible-2.pdf](https://obr.uk/docs/dlm_uploads/CCS0222366764-001_OBR-EFO-March-2022_Web-Accessible-2.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.resolutionfoundation.org/app/uploads/2022/03/Inflation-nation.pdf>

benefit and council tax support). If a resident is in receipt of universal credit *and* council tax support, that resident will appear in the dataset. If a resident receives universal credit but no council tax support, they will not be included. As a rough guide, approximately 25% of universal credit recipients do also receive council tax support, meaning that it is 75% of Adur & Worthing universal credit recipients (approximately 9000 residents currently) who are not visible to us via LIFT.

		Sep 21*	Jan 22	Feb 22	Mar 22	Apr 22	May 22
<b>Total households in LIFT dataset</b>	<b>Adur</b>	4171	4115	4087	4039	3999	3999
	<b>Worthing</b>	6831	6863	6832	6798	6728	6731
	<b>A&amp;W</b>	11002	10978	10919	10837	10727	10730
<b>Total households in LIFT and on UC i.e claim CTS and UC</b>	<b>Adur</b>	1021	1068	1056	1031	1011	1041
	<b>Worthing</b>	1661	1751	1751	1735	1702	1763
	<b>A&amp;W</b>	2682	2819	2807	2766	2713	2804
<b>Total households on UC (source: <a href="#">LG Inform</a>)</b>	<b>Adur</b>	4700	4412	4416	4417	4343	4369
	<b>Worthing</b>	8488	8099	8115	8036	8027	8075
	<b>A&amp;W</b>	13188	12511	12531	12453	12370	12444
<b>On UC and not visible in LIFT</b>	<b>Adur</b>	3679	3344	3360	3386	3332	3328
	<b>Worthing</b>	6827	6348	6364	6301	6325	6312
	<b>A&amp;W</b>	10506	9692	9724	9687	9657	9640

\*Sep 21 is the first with available data

3.7 The table shows that the numbers on Universal Credit have decreased since September 2021 (a decrease of 5.6% for those on UC alone) and that the numbers appearing in the LIFT dataset have decreased by 2.3%. When the government introduced Universal Credit, it did so to replace a range of working-age benefits into

one single benefit and payment. A “managed migration” was piloted in 2019, with the rest of the UK migration planned to be complete by the end of 2023. The process was halted by the pandemic, but in April this year the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions announced that the new target completion date for managed migration is now September 2024. A “natural migration” will occur in the meantime for anyone who has a change of circumstances such as a legacy benefit ending or a change in household. The position for legacy benefits post-migration is that non-working age residents will remain on housing benefit. Residents in temporary or supported accommodation will also continue to stay on Housing Benefit. Council Tax Support will also remain in place.

- 3.8 As highlighted in the January JSC report, people may leave the data set for reasons other than migrating to Universal Credit - for example if they secure employment and come off benefits altogether, or if they move out of area or if they die.
- 3.9 We can analyse the LIFT dataset at a cumulative level in order to understand the demographics of those residents who receive legacy benefits currently. It is not possible to show the gender breakdown at an overall level because gender data is only available to us once anonymised data is cross referenced with housing benefit data to produce person identifiable data. It is not possible to show the ethnicity of those contained in the data set because the councils’ Revenues and Benefits team does not collect ethnicity data on its benefit application forms:

**Demographic breakdown of 10,727 residents contained in LIFT**  
**(April 2022 data) Adur/Worthing**

Gender	<b>Not possible to identify at collective level</b>
Ethnicity	<b>Not collected at source (ie on council benefit applications)</b>
Household type	<b>495 couples without children, 2508 single, 269 couples with children, 727 lone parents</b> <i>655 couples without children, 4693 single, 366 couples with children, 1014 lone parents</i>
Tenure type	<b>1025 Council tenant, 1091 Owner occupier, 987 Private tenant, 721 Social tenant, 96 Supported housing, 79 Temporary accommodation</b> <i>0 Council tenant, 1498 Owner occupier, 2066 Private tenant, 2329 Social tenant, 614 Supported housing, 221 Temporary accommodation</i>
Economic status	<b>608 (15.2%) in work; 3391 (84.8%) not in work</b> <i>804 (12%) in work, 5924 (88%) not in work</i>
Ward	<b>97 Buckingham, 305 Churchill, 242 Cokeham, 403 Eastbrook, 259 Hillside, 143 Manor, 170 Marine, 392 Mash Barn, 301 Peverel, 436 Southlands, 278 Southwick Green, 389 St Mary’s, 137 St Nicolas, 391 Widewater, out of area 56</b> <i>429 Broadwater, 574 Castle, 1104 Central, 431 Durrington, 500 Gaisford, 280 Goring, 768 Heene, 305 Marine, 480 Northbrook, 187 Offington, 438 Salvington, 654 Seldon, 474 Tarring, out of area 104</i>

Disability status	<b>1774 (44.4%) claiming disability benefits, 2225 (55.6%) not disabled</b> <i>3143 (46.7%) claiming disability benefits, 3585 (53.3%) not disabled</i>
Financial risk status	<b>3630 coping 99 struggling 253 at risk 17 in crisis</b> <i>5802 coping 236 struggling 656 at risk 34 in crisis</i>
Age	<b>28 16-21;181 22-29; 482 30-39; 545 40-49; 673 50-59; 628 60-69; 1462 70+</b> <i>73 16-21; 365 22-29; 816 30-39; 980 40-49; 1178 50-59; 1084 60-69; 2232 70+</i>

3.10 LIFT also provides a financial risk score for each resident in the dashboard. As a reminder, these are calculated by Policy in Practice by reviewing known household income and anticipated household costs (using Office for National Statistics data about typical household spend for particular household types and sizes). The four financial risk scores are:

- **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.

A&W residents contained in LIFT datasets, shown by Headline Financial Risk Category

	Number of households “coping”					Number of households “not coping” (Struggling, At Risk and In Crisis)				
	Jan 22	Feb 22	Mar 22	Apr 22	May 22	Jan 22	Feb 22	Mar 22	Apr 22	May 22
<b>Adur</b>	3784	3770	3731	3630	3626	331	317	308	369	373
<b>Worthing</b>	6058	6058	6016	5802	5809	805	787	782	926	922
<b>A&amp;W</b>	9842	9815	9747	9432	9435	1136	1104	1090	1295	1295

3.11 As anticipated due to cost of living pressures, the number of households “coping” has been declining since the start of the year, and at an increasing pace. There is a particularly noticeable drop in April, which was sustained in May. April is when the new NI rates, combined with increased prices will have impacted residents. The picture is consistent between our two authorities, with Adur experiencing 4% fewer households “coping” in May compared to January, and Worthing 6% fewer.

3.12 If we look in more detail at the risk categories (see the table below), we can see a worrying shift, in April 2022, in the sense that many people moved from a “coping” or a “struggling” category to an “at risk” category i.e. their financial situation worsened and they moved further away from coping and further towards crisis. An additional 648 residents were “at risk” in April compared to January (168 in Adur, 480 in

Worthing). Those already at “crisis” levels of financial need have, so far, remained fairly stable, but we anticipate seeing more in this category if the shift into and beyond struggling continues.

A&W residents contained in LIFT datasets, shown by granular Financial Risk Categories

Number of households in LIFT		Jan 22	Feb 22	Mar 22	Apr 22	May 22
<b>Coping:</b> Household income exceeds expected costs by £100+ pcm.	<b>Adur</b>	3784	3770	3731	3630	3626
	<b>Worthing</b>	6058	6058	6016	5802	5809
	<b>A&amp;W</b>	9842	9815	9747	9432	9435
<b>Struggling:</b> Household income exceeds costs by £0-100 pcm	<b>Adur</b>	228	215	207	99	96
	<b>Worthing</b>	589	586	584	236	236
	<b>A&amp;W</b>	817	801	791	335	332
<b>At Risk:</b> Household income is less than expected costs.	<b>Adur</b>	85	84	83	253	261
	<b>Worthing</b>	176	161	164	656	651
	<b>A&amp;W</b>	261	245	247	909	912
<b>In Crisis:</b> Household income insufficient for housing.	<b>Adur</b>	18	18	18	17	16
	<b>Worthing</b>	40	40	34	34	35
	<b>A&amp;W</b>	58	58	52	51	51

3.13 We reported in January 2022 that we could see some correlation between households appearing in LIFT and wards identified in the 2019 Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) as having the highest levels of deprivation. This correlation was stronger in Worthing than Adur. The IMD identifies eight wards (Churchill, Peverel and Eastbrook in Adur; and Castle, Central, Heene, Northbrook and Broadwater in Worthing) as having particular challenges.

3.14 The table below shows (April 2022 data) the five wards for each authority with the greatest number of households in the “not coping” categories. This is based on the total number of households on Housing Benefit or Council Tax Support that are "not coping" in each ward and is not weighted by population density or ward size.

<b>Adur</b>	<b>Worthing</b>
Southlands	Central
Eastbrook	Heene
St Mary's	Seldon
Widewater	Castle
Mashbarn	Northbrook

#### **4 Progress on the Proactive work outlined in previous committee reports**

4.1 The pathway that the Proactive team uses contains five steps:

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

4.2 The team has continued to follow this pathway in the same manner as described in previous reports. Customer Service Advisers continue to make all outbound phone calls, and resolve approximately three quarters at first point of contact. Those 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 Programme for detailed and/or ongoing financial advice/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

4.3 In the January 2022 report, we were able to report on the changes to financial risk scores for cohorts 1-10 and on household income/arrears for cohorts 1-7. It was too early at that point to measure the financial or wellbeing outcomes for cohorts 8-10 but

these are now available below. Whilst a good average increase in household income has been achieved, this has not, for these cohorts, translated into reduced council arrears. We do not explore the reasons for this with residents but speculate that some residents in LIFT will have multiple debts with multiple organisations and may prioritise paying those before paying council debts. The Proactive team is about to start a wider piece of work focusing on an ethical debt recovery policies and processes and will have the opportunity to explore questions like this further.

Household income/arrears for cohorts 8-10  
(Measured from phone contact + 4 months)

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)	
	Value	Direction	Value	Direction	Value	Direction
8-10	+£126		+£14		+£4	

- 4.4 In terms of residents’ self assessed wellbeing scores, and how those compared after working with us to when we first made contact, the data we have been able to elicit is too limited to be useful (just 6 residents for cohorts 8-10 were prepared to revisit their scores, with 53 proving uncontactable or unwilling to provide updated scores). In para 4.17 below, we set out our new approach to assessing the non-financial impacts of our work on residents.
- 4.5 The commitment made in the January 2022 report was that the Proactive team would prioritise telephoning residents at the “coping/not coping” boundary. Progress made by the Customer Service team since then has been slower than we would have liked or anticipated. Our plan was to attempt contact on at least two occasions with an average of 100 residents per month, in order to have attempted telephone contact with 1000 residents by the end of the calendar year. Between January and May we were able to attempt contact with 294 residents and managed to successfully engage 66 of those.
- 4.6 The factors that have slowed progress are a mix of predictable and unforeseen. The predictable factor was Annual Billing, which causes a significant spike in calls to the Customer Service team each April. Additionally, as the cost of living impacts grow incrementally, reactive demand for advice has been increasing e.g. calls to our housing line increased by 8.4% between April 2021 and April 2022 (rising from 1110 calls in the former to 1203 in the latter). Our policy in Customer Services is only to commit time to proactive work when reactive work allows, and we have asked advisers who had protected time for proactive work to switch to taking incoming calls whenever queues were building up.

- 4.7 The team had two *unforeseen* events to contend with in March and April that also reduced our ability to undertake proactive work. The first was a major IT incident on 6 March, which impacted the network and multiple systems and services. This left Customer Services without a working phone system for office based staff and without access to the various systems that we need to access in order to advise and support customers. The lack of systems was complete for several days and partial for 3 weeks. The team needed to record messages advising customers to call back once the systems were re-established, and this led to a backlog of demand to deal with when the incident was resolved in full.
- 4.8 The second unforeseen incident was the industrial action affecting waste services that took place between 14 March and 21 April 2022. Customer Services received an additional 3543 waste calls in March and April (7598 for both months compared to 4044 for January and February). Calls remained higher than normal for a 4 or 5 week period following the end of the strike, as residents raised queries about the catchup rota, missed bins and the temporary cessation of garden waste collections.
- 4.9 Details of the groups of residents that we were able to contact since we last reported are contained in Appendix One. Details of future groups that we plan to telephone over the remainder of 2022 are contained in Appendix Two.
- 4.10 In terms of outcomes and impacts for the 66 residents we have been working with since the last report, we have again considered both financial and wellbeing impacts.

Household income/arrears for cohorts 11-17  
(Measured from initial contact to review date)

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)
11	+£130	-£107	-£36
12	+£82	+£81	-£14
13	+£399	+£269	£0*
14	+£37	+38	£0
15	-£6	-£12	-£17
16**	-	-	-
17	+£73	+£9	+£14

\* there were no arrears prior to engagement so the figure has remained unchanged

\*\* there was no engagement with this cohort - only 3 households in total

- 4.11 With the exception of cohort 15, we can see positive improvements to household income levels, that would amount to an annual increase of at least £444 per resident per year (cohort 14) and as much as £4788 per year (cohort 13). All but one of the cohorts to have experienced an improved household income have also reduced their council debts. Cohort 17 has not reduced its council arrears, despite an improvement in household income - it is possible that people with multiple debts choose to prioritise non-council debts for payment first, or it could simply be that they choose to spend that income in other ways
- 4.12 It is worth emphasising that LIFT only shows increases in income that are not temporary and that residents who are awarded discretionary housing payments, for example, will not show any increase in their household income. Cohort 15, the outlier in the chart above, contained households who were potentially entitled to a discretionary housing payment. We know that two households in that cohort did successfully apply for a DHP and will have received one off payments towards their housing costs. Others in that cohort were sent application forms but did not return them, or were ultimately found to be ineligible for DHP.
- 4.13 Whilst we can see the majority of the 66 residents improved their household income, their financial risk scores have not changed significantly: 8 have improved their financial situation, 50 have remained the same and 3 have left the dataset altogether (this could be due to an improved financial situation but could also be due to a move out of area, for example):
- Numbers coping have increased from 40 to 45
  - Numbers struggling reduced from 6 to 2
  - Numbers at risk increased from 14 to 16
  - Numbers in crisis reduced from 3 to 0
  - Numbers leaving the data set altogether totalled 3
- 4.14 There are 5 residents whose financial situation has worsened since engaging with the Proactive team - all 5 have gone from struggling to at risk.
- 4.15 The most likely explanation for the risk scores not changing as much as the increases in income might lead us to anticipate is that costs are increasing at a rate higher and faster than the improvements in income that residents are able to achieve via benefit uptake. It is important to emphasise the limits of the financial help that we will be able to provide in that way and to highlight wider work within the councils that focuses on skills and employability coaching etc. For those residents who are already working and who receive the maximum benefit support available, however, there is little financial support that we can offer directly.
- 4.16 In terms of wellbeing impacts for cohorts 11-19, the data that we have been able to obtain was again limited, as residents are reluctant to spend time discussing their wellbeing in follow up phone calls 4 months after we first contacted them. The limited data in the table below shows that the majority of those we have worked with have

experienced a deterioration in their sense of wellbeing. Given the cost of living crisis, and the fact that the questions focus in particular on how people feel about their ability to manage their finances, this is confirmation that financial challenges are associated with wellbeing challenges. We are proactively working on our response to the cost of living crisis, and given the known correlation of economic challenge and hardship on health and wellbeing, we are anticipating an increase in demand for communities and wellbeing services. To ensure we are able to robustly respond to the increase in demand, we will better use insights data to tell us more about our communities and target support where the need is greatest.

Category	Cohorts 11-19								
	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18*	19**
Number whose self assessment score is worse than initially	2	1	3	7	1	0	0	0	0
Number whose self assessment is the same as initially	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
Number whose self assessment improves by 1-4 points	0	0	0	1	0	0	2	0	0
Number whose self assessment improves by 5+ points	1	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0
Number who could not be contacted or did not want to provide new wellbeing scores	12	6	7	27	7	3	8	1	0
Total engaged	15	7	10	37	8	0	11	1	0

18\* this has only one household engaging as the cohort has not been started for callouts - the customer contacted us about issues through the contact centre

19\*\* cohort not yet started for callouts

4.17 Given the low engagement level with follow up wellbeing scores, we have changed approach, and from May 2022 have been trialling a more open conversation about residents' feedback on their experience of receiving proactive contact. We ask residents whether they would suggest any changes to how we contact future residents, and we also ask whether their perception of the councils has changed as a result of being contacted. Early feedback examples are shown below:

**Customer stories:**

Customer A - Mrs W - Working age widow, severely disabled- nearing pension

“Before I got your first call, I saw the council as somewhere very official. I had no idea of any help available at all. I now know there is somebody out there to talk to and that there is support available - and that you want to help. I don't have any suggestions/feedback about what to change”

Customer B - Mr H - Working aged man with disability- single occupant

“Before hearing from you I didn’t have any thoughts about the council and wasn’t aware of any help. I am now aware you can help with a lot more than I realised. I’ve been helped to apply for PIP and been put in touch with occupational therapy about a disabled adaption. I don’t have any feedback about what to change”

Customer C - Mrs H - working aged widow with disability

“Before you contacted me I already received council benefits but wasn’t sure what would happen when my husband died. I was scared to contact the council in case things would change for the worse and I wouldn’t be able to cope. I now feel so much better about contacting the councils. I think things were clearly explained and that I knew what to expect, and was reassured. I was very open to receiving help but I know others would be embarrassed or ashamed, so it’s important to keep being kind and understanding - I think your approach would help people inclined to feel that way, as I never felt embarrassed or uncomfortable. I hope you keep doing this work because it helped me at a time when it felt like everything was falling apart”

- 4.18 With a view to our secondary objective for this work (building staff capability to work in a person-centred, cross service way) we have also collected staff feedback from those doing the front line work. We have asked colleagues to describe how they’ve found working in this new way, what training and/or job based learning it has provided, and what impact it’s had on their professional development and that of others:

**Staff stories:**

““ I have been making proactive calls for over a year now. I have undertaken several training courses on how best to help people with physical and mental illnesses and incapacities and other barriers to coping, spotting those being exploited, communicating better with people and managing difficult conversations. This has definitely impacted on how I approach my day to day work, even outside of the project and has given me tools and techniques to be better equipped to help and understand those who are atypical or especially vulnerable. This has, also, impacted on me personally and has made me a more patient and understanding person, who tries different approaches with people that I’m struggling to communicate effectively with. On a personal level, it has been very satisfying to feel like I have genuinely been able to make a difference in the lives of some people, even if that has only been to make them feel like they are not alone and can reach out to the councils for support and understanding” **Customer Service Adviser**

““I have been more involved in proactive work for the last couple of months within the Case Review team. The learning I have gained is job based rather than training courses. It has been so useful to be part of a multi disciplinary team working group. I have found it really helps highlight specific needs of a customer by looking at all

teams' working structures in the best way in how we can support and improve moving forward. I have really grown by listening to others' thoughts and ideas and it pushes me to be more involved and ensure I strive to have input and a voice. I have refocused on the importance of customers' often complex needs. It has made me look at and re-evaluate my thinking - are we doing the best we can for a customer? It has also embedded my and my team's working practice as we do already have some really good support in place. I have found it great that we can come up with a group focus for our customers and it has highlighted the value of the close working relationships with Housing, Customer Services, Adjudication, Revenues, Communities & Wellbeing. I have also realised that it is so important to offer full support and I will continue to keep building these cross department relationships” **Member of the Case Review team**

## **5 Progress on embedding and scaling up the reach of this work**

5.1 We have identified three main ways via which to embed and scale this work Progress under each is listed below.

### **Embedding staff resources and learning**

5.2 As reported to the Joint Strategic Committee in January 2022, the Proactive team was awarded temporary COMF funding that it was able to use in the short term to boost the customer service team with two temporary members of staff to backfill experienced advisers who undertake proactive calls. However, as outlined earlier in this report, the amount of reactive demand on the customer service team increased significantly, meaning that these COMF funded advisers spent the majority of their time on reactive work. The reactive calls they dealt with were from residents seeking help with benefits, so the work was still to support those experiencing financial challenge and was still an appropriate use of the COMF funding.

5.3 In January 2022, we reported that the councils' Housing team had also provided funding to customer services for them to recruit temporary backfill staff to free up permanent advisers to call residents who are on the housing application waiting list. The team were to assist residents to complete Income & Expenditure forms and to carry out as much pre-work as possible before referring those residents to housing officers. The aim was to speed up how quickly those residents receive advice and help and will free up the housing to shift from reactive to preventative, upstream work. This work has been delayed to ensure that systems are in place and the work generated can be managed by the housing team but it is anticipated to now start from mid June.

5.4 For the period April-June 2022, a new, temporary Proactive team structure has been put in place, using existing resources and to move us beyond the phone-call model seen to date and enable us to focus more intensively on the appropriate process and policy change that would improve the support the councils provide to low income residents and to provide learning about this approach.

5.5 The temporary structure is designed to facilitate a continuous improvement loop in the sense that problems identified by the case review team are given to the policy team to address via appropriate process and/or policy change, and those changes can then be user tested by the case review team and the residents it works with:

<b>Case Review Team</b>	<b>Policy &amp; Process Team</b>	<b>Sponsorship Team</b>
<b>Goal:</b> Trial joined up case work for individual residents; Highlight insights to the Policy team; User test changes developed by the Policy team	<b>Goal:</b> Develop new policy, process and operational recommendations for sponsors, learning from best practice and insight. Take account of resident experiences (from case review team) and pain points identified via service mapping	<b>Goal:</b> Oversee pace, prioritisation and progress from all teams on Proactive and on linked work such as systems improvement projects and wider Thrive work. Make decisions on recommended changes
<b>Membership:</b> Front line advisers and managers	<b>Membership:</b> Senior operational managers	<b>Membership:</b> Directors and Heads of Service
Rhythm: Fortnightly meetings	Rhythm: Fortnightly meetings	Rhythm: 6 weekly meetings

5.6 The case review team has been chaired by the councils’ Housing Needs Manager, who has experience of chairing multi-agency case review teams and who has been able to grow the team’s competence and confidence in working in this way. The team has so far reviewed cases where we feel that we might have helped a resident to achieve a better outcome had we intervened earlier, or differently, but we will also review those where we feel our support was particularly effective and helpful. In both cases, we can establish themes to “lessons learned” and identify pain points that need addressing and success points/good practice that we can embed further and more widely.

5.7 The key themes to improvements that we have so far identified would provide better support to residents in financial difficulty are:

- Key frontline teams share “need to know” information with each other to best support residents who have disclosed circumstances to one particular team.
- Frontline services need to be joined up and be able to transfer cases between each other, as well as working collaboratively together so that customers do not feel they are being passed back and forth.
- Training and peer support should be available to all front line teams regarding identifying and then responding sensitively to vulnerability. We have already shared the [Cabinet Office’s Debt Management Vulnerability toolkit](#) and have also shared

training such as motivational interviewing, trauma informed practice and building resilience.

- The need to review our current debt recovery processes and policies to ensure that these follow current best practice in balancing the need of the councils to recover lost revenue and the need to adopt an approach that is both empathetic and effective in those cases where people are struggling to pay.

5.8 The policy and process team has been able to progress both single-service work that will improve the support/experience for vulnerable residents and also on collaborative, cross-service working. Key outcomes/impacts seen so far include:

- Providing additional signposting and self service advice to residents via the council website e.g. the provision of new and/or improved [money support pages](#), a [local services information leaflet](#), a [universal credit benefit calculator](#) and a [Money helper tool](#)
- Funding secured is being targeted to help support the 'food insecurity' agenda, and to support local initiatives to have greater capacity to form a community response to those facing economic disadvantage.
- Revenues have completed a review of the Council tax reminder letter and the reminder insert.
- Benefits has also reviewed our letter we send to customers asking for further information when a new claim is received.
- Initial mapping of several key processes has been completed (including debt recovery, applying for benefits and proactive contact). These maps will help teams to understand each other's processes, and be used as we change our debt recovery processes
- We are reviewing our 'Find It' service, which provides signposting and referrals for professionals.
- Establishing intranet pages and staff newsletter content regarding Proactive and using service and directorate meetings to share training/best practice/lessons learned in order to encourage a more person centred approach

5.9 The ethical debt recovery review referenced above is the policy and process team's primary focus. This work will be developed and shaped up between officers and brought back to the respective Cabinet Members over the summer.

5.10 The sponsorship group has met twice so far, to review progress and to assist with the prioritisation of resources, suggestions and with moving recommendations towards implementation, via options/feasibility studies. This group is key in ensuring that

other improvement work, particularly digital improvement work, reflects the user needs identified by the other parts of the Proactive model.

### **Digital solutions (scaling up via technology)**

- 5.11 Access direct to the LIFT tool is via licences, which come at a cost. The Proactive team has therefore developed a dashboard, which it updates monthly, and which captures key information from LIFT. The dashboard contains three main sections, some of which need further development work at this stage. The first shows what is happening in our Adur & Worthing community i.e. the numbers of residents receiving benefits and the numbers who fall into the different definitions of poverty. The second section shows the impact we are making via Proactive work i.e. the numbers of people contacted, engaged and referred to other teams and/or partner organisations. The final section shows what we will be working on next i.e. future cohorts that we plan to contact by phone and/or digitally. Once the dashboard has been finalised, it can be shared monthly with council teams, Elected Members, Partners and, in time, with residents and community groups too.
- 5.12 In the Proactive team's previous two reports to this committee, the Director for Communities advised that our Housing team wanted, via COMF, to purchase Telljo, a digital tool that provides residents with automated signposting, via text or email, to improve their wellbeing, improve their financial situation and sustain their tenancies. Telljo takes users through a simple assessment that can be completed on a smartphone and provides automated signposting to local and national support services such as immediate independent debt advice, as well as consenting to contact from the council to make repayment arrangements
- 5.13 A procurement/purchase process is nearing completion and Telljo will be operational with effect from mid July with training dates and test cohorts being currently agreed. Telljo will be used by a number of services, for a variety of prevention focused pieces of work. Housing will be using it to both prevent homelessness by providing support to those who have contacted us for housing advice as well as help those in temporary accommodation in need of move on by ensuring that their support needs are known and addressed and debt does not prevent them accessing the settled homes they need. The proactive team will use it in order to reach those "not coping" residents that it has not already telephoned which will upstream homelessness prevention by supporting at an early stage. We should be in a position to test our first couple of cohorts for that purpose by the end of July 2022. Insight obtained from the supplier, and from Chichester and Mid Sussex Councils, who already use Telljo, suggests that for every 1000 residents sent the link:
- Up to 25% of residents will complete the Digital self assessment
  - 15% may send the councils an email notification to request a payment arrangement

- 9% will request and receive debt advice from the Money Advice and Pensions Service or an agency within their network that they refer to within 60 seconds (0900-1500)
  - 40% will be automatically referred to debt or water tariff savings
  - 93% give additional information creating opportunity for further engagement
- 5.14 We will undertake our own testing to get a good sense of the likely response rates and the requests for different types of intervention/support that may be made of the councils' different service areas i.e. we will send messaging to small numbers initially and scale up to the degree that we can support.
- 5.15 The councils digital and service design teams continue to make good progress in developing part of "Citizen Hub" (the council's CRM) for the Proactive team to enable different service teams to share information from their own systems. .
- 5.16 The Revenues & Benefits teams continue to progress the implementation of eforms which will, in time, replace the need to complete paper forms for a number of customer transactions (including applying for Housing Benefit and/or Council Tax Support, applying for a Council Tax discount/exemption, and notification about changes in circumstances).

#### **Partnership working (scaling up via collaboration)**

- 5.17 A "round table" partnership has been convened by the Councils to focus on the cost of living crisis, bringing together a number of external partners from across the system, focusing on how we can work together to better support the most vulnerable people in our community. This group has met twice and COMF funding has been used to bring in some additional capacity to the Councils to deliver an action plan for this work.
- 5.18 The councils shared its data analysis from LIFT with partners and it was agreed that partners need to work collaboratively around person centred data to obtain the richest possible picture of individuals. It is acknowledged that there are barriers to cross-organisational data sharing, not least perceived risks in terms of GDPR and also in terms of organisation level targets and KPIs that can work against that person focused approach. Shared data can also provide us with a shared picture of opportunities and needs, and of assets within the system too.
- 5.19 In line with its ambition to grow its data capabilities, the councils have recently appointed a new Data Lead, who will establish a partnership data group and will, alongside others, consider implementing the necessary data sharing agreements that would enable us to exchange data with partners as and when capacity allows.
- 5.20 The partnership will actively seek ways to better engage with residents that face barriers in accessing traditional building based services and will build upon and

develop approaches for residents to access information and support at a time and in a way that suits them best, an example of this is our 'Find It' service, we will create agility in our system to prevent people falling through gaps.

- 5.21 Our intention is to better understand residents' journeys through our system, which in turn will inform our no wrong door approach and ensure that residents are not disadvantaged by our own internal processes. We will develop ways of working that are consistent for residents regardless of which service they require, or how they access services. We will use strength based ways of engaging and communicating with residents that builds a respectful rapport and is predicated on seeking solutions.

## **6 Next steps for Proactive**

- 6.1 The current LIFT contract at a cost of £35K pa for year one and £28k for year two is in place until May 2023. A decision on whether to renew the contract will be made later in this financial year, following a review of how teams have continued to use it, and of how the tool itself has evolved - including whether it is able to include data on Universal Credit recipients.
- 6.2 Front line, proactive phone calls and associated email/text support has been shown to work well, and will continue to the extent that staff resourcing levels (compared to the levels of demand for reactive advice and support) allow.
- 6.3 As outlined above, the intention is to use Telljo and/or Matsoft to make first contact with residents via digital means to enable this work to scale. This will lead to some residents requesting telephone and/or in-person support, which could be over a number of weeks. Digital tools will prompt increased demands on staff resources and therefore will require close monitoring and testing around the use of digital technology and demand regarding resourcing levels available to us.
- 6.4 A roadmap is also being developed with the teams to work on a number of policy and process issues that will improve our overall approach to debt, ensuring an ethical and person centred approach.

## **7 Managing risks and uncertainties arising from this work**

- 7.1 As previously reported to the Joint Strategic Committee, Citizen Hub (our CRM) remains crucial in order to allow us to scale up this work and to support council teams working as multi disciplinary teams. The full CRM project remains a long term one which will be delivered in stages between now and 2023.
- 7.2 Capacity remains the most significant barrier to this work being embedded and scaled (as outlined above). The Councils' Leadership Team are reviewing progress on a regular basis and have asked relevant teams to commit protected time to proactive work.

## **8 Engagement and Communication**

- 8.1 The Proactive team has engaged internally and with partners including Age UK, Arun District Council, Boo Credit Union, CAP UK, Citizens Advice (Arun & Chichester and West Sussex), Community Works, DWP, Southern Water, West Sussex County Council and Worthing Homes. The teams have updated/increased information about available support for low income residents on the councils' webpages and this will assist those who approach us for help as well as those whom we proactively contact. The team have also published new intranet pages as it is important that all council staff are aware of the sources of help, and the referral routes available for residents, friends, family or themselves as they encounter periods of financial hardship.

## **9 Financial Implications**

- 9.1 The cost of supporting the cohorts identified is being met from existing staff resources although this can cause resourcing challenges for some Heads of Service. At present it is not possible to identify the cost of staff resources being deployed to support residents identified via the Proactive Project.
- 9.2 The cost of the LIFT platform is currently funded from the Business Development Fund. However if the Councils wish to continue with the tool for 2023/24 then this will need to be considered as part of the development of the 2023/24 budget.

## **10 Legal Implications**

- 10.1 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 Full Discharge of any of their functions.
- 10.2 Section 1 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
- 10.3 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.
- 10.4 Under the Council Tax (Administration and Enforcement) Regulations 1992 the Councils have the power to make arrangements or agreements with a Council tax payer for payment of outstanding Council tax as are necessary and within the scope of the Regulations.
- 10.5 The councils have statutory responsibilities for housing, including a duty to provide advice and support to prevent homelessness, and a requirement to help residents find suitable and sustainable accommodation if they are already homeless.

- 10.6 Section 13A of the Local Government Finance Act 2012 requires the councils to make a scheme specifying reductions in council tax payable by people in financial need.
- 10.7 The Department for Work and Pensions provides funding to West Sussex County Council under section 31 of the Local Government Act 2003, to administer the Household Support Fund scheme and provide assistance to households most in need. West Sussex County Council must in turn work with Adur and Worthing councils to ensure the funding meets its objectives by identifying and supporting those most in need, potentially as delivery partners.

### **Background Papers**

- Proactive interventions to support low income residents (JSC January 2022)
- Proactive interventions to support low income residents (JSC July 2021)
- Covid Benefit Measures on Vulnerable Residents (JSC February 2021)
- Building our data capability (JSC February 2021)

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## **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 One:

#### Description for cohorts 13-19 selected for proactive contact January to May 2022

		<b>size</b>	<b>% engaging*</b>
<b>13</b>	Unemployed 24 or under at risk or struggling and out of work for other reasons ie not carers,disabled or lone parent.	71	14.1%
<b>14</b>	Pension age and have been flagged by policy in practice as potentially entitled to pension credit	165	22.4%
<b>15</b>	Households potentially entitled to Discretionary Housing Payments.	27	29.6%
<b>16</b>	Households that have moved out of the LIFT dataset but could potentially qualify for Council Tax Support	3	0%
<b>17</b>	Households under 24 with high barriers to work	117	9.4%
<b>18</b>	Households under 24 with medium barriers to work	19	Not yet started
<b>19</b>	Council Tenants in Food poverty	19	Not yet started
	<b>TOTAL NUMBER</b>	<b>421</b>	

\* ie number of households that agree to work with us out of the total cohort size e.g. in cohort 13, which contained seventy one residents, ten agreed to work with the team giving an engagement rate of 14.1%

#### Demographics for cohorts 13-17who engaged with Proactive team (66 residents **Adur/Worthing** residents)

Gender	<b>6 (60%) Female, 4 (40%) Male,</b> <i>25 (44.6%) Female, 31 (55.4%) Male,</i>
Household type	<b>0 couples without children, 9 single, 0 couples with children, 1 lone parents</b> <i>1 couples without children, 47 single, 0 couples with children, 8 lone parents</i>
Economic status	<b>1 in work; 9 not in work (1 carer, 2 disabled, 2 lone parent, 5 other)</b> <i>2 in work, 54 not in work (3 carer, 22 disabled, 6 lone parent, 23 other)</i>
Ward	<b>0 Buckingham, 0 Churchill, 0 Cokeham, 1 Eastbrook, 1 Hillside, 0 Manor, 1 Marine, 0 Mash Barn, 0 Peverel, 2 Southlands, 0 Southwick Green, 1 St Mary's, 1 St Nicolas, 1 Widewater, 2 Other wards</b> <i>2 Broadwater, 4 Castle, 12 Central, 3 Durrington, 3 Gaisford, 5 Goring, 9 Heene, 4 Marine, 1 Northbrook, 1 Offington, 4 Salvington, 6 Seldon, 0 Tarring, 2 other wards</i>
Disability	<b>2 (20%) claiming disability benefits, 8 (80%) not disabled</b> <i>22 (39.3%) claiming disability benefits, 34 (60.7%) not disabled</i>
Financial risk status	<b>3 coping 2 struggling 4 at risk 1 in crisis</b> <i>40 coping 4 struggling 10 at risk 2 in crisis</i>

Age	<b>2 16-21; 2 22-29; 0 30-39; 1 40-49; 2 50-59; 1 60-69; 2 70+</b> 5 16-21; 12 22-29; 0 30-39; 1 40-49; 3 50-59; 19 60-69; 16 70+
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### Appendix Two:

Cohorts selected for contact June-September (lists will be reviewed each month and may change in the light of dashboard data regarding types of poverty etc)

20	40 “not copings” who are council tenants (struggling and at risk) - Adur only
21	46 “not copings” who are private tenants and either a couple with children, a couple or a lone parent (struggling and at risk) - Adur and Worthing
22	104 “not copings” private tenants who are single and claiming a disability benefit (struggling and at risk) - Adur and Worthing (3 residents are in this category and also claiming a carer discount - see next category)
23	12 “not copings” private tenants who are single and claiming a carer discount (struggling and at risk) - Adur and Worthing
24	76 “not copings” Private tenants who are single not claiming either a disability benefit or a carers discount (struggling and at risk) - Adur only
25	234 “not copings” Private tenants who are single not claiming either a disability benefit or a carers discount (struggling and at risk) - Worthing only
26	61 “not copings” owner occupier (struggling and at risk) - Adur only
27	105 “not copings” owner occupier (struggling and at risk) - Worthing only
28	84 “not copings” social tenants (struggling and at risk) - Adur only
29	34 “not copings” social tenants who are either couples with children, couples or lone parents (struggling and at risk) - Worthing
30	120 “not copings” social tenants who are single and claiming a disability benefit (struggling and at risk) - Worthing
31	86 “not copings” social tenants who are single and not claiming a disability benefit Worthing

Those in temporary accommodation or supported housing are not targeted for proactive support, at the request of the Housing team (as that team will already be working with them)