

Motion - Cost of Living Crisis and Emergency

This Council notes that families and individuals living in East Herts District and across the whole country are facing a huge Cost of Living Crisis. The costs of fuel and energy have risen dramatically, as has the cost of food. Inflation is running in double figures, but wages are not keeping pace. Many families are struggling to pay their bills, and some are facing the terrible choice of having to decide whether to buy food or to pay to heat their homes. The use of Food Banks has increased dramatically, and the citizen's Advice service is helping more people than ever before.

The Government has introduced a cap on energy Bills, but this has been set at £2,500, which is still too expensive for many people. Furthermore, this cap is only guaranteed until next April.

The cost of mortgage repayments has rocketed as a result of the reckless mini-Budget brought in by Prime Minister, Liz Truss. Many families in East Herts now face higher costs of £100s per month and have no idea how they can possibly pay. Businesses in the district will also be affected by these higher interest rates.

East Herts Citizens Advice reports a 56% increase in Charitable Support and Food Bank referrals compared to the same 3 months in 2021. The most common debt issue has changed from Council tax arrears in 2019/20 to energy debts between April and June in 2022. And in April and June in 2019 3.1 people per 10,000 were in need of crisis support- this has now risen to 8.1 people.

Bishop's Stortford Food Bank is feeding more people than ever before. Demand increased by 225% from 2019 to 2020 and has continued to rise by 15% each year. Where it previously gave out 28 food parcels per month it now gives out 28 per week, and it is feeding 266 people per month. It is on course to help 3,200 people this year – 32% up on 2021.

We are all living in the midst of a serious Cost of Living Crisis and Emergency.

Council does note the Government's Decision, taken in June 2022, to impose a Windfall Tax on the super profits of the oil and gas companies and to redistribute this as a one-off payment to many households. Though this Windfall Tax is welcome, and the payments are helpful, not everyone is out of difficulty. Council believes that it does not go nearly far enough, and that the Government should be doing much more to support the people of East Herts through this Cost-of-Living Crisis.

East Herts Council therefore declares a "Cost of Living Emergency" and calls on the Government to:-

- a) Immediately restore the Universal Credit supplement of £20.
- b) Investigate all other means of helping the residents of East Herts as they face this emergency.

Accordingly, East Herts District Council instructs the Chief Executive to write to the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions and to the Chancellor of the Exchequer to ask for the £20 Universal Credit supplement to be restored, and to ask for other means of assistance to be investigated as a matter of urgency.

Proposed by Cllr Mione Goldspink

Seconded by Cllr Joseph Dumont