

Elmbridge Borough Council – cost of living work

Elmbridge Borough Council introduced the Elmbridge Cost of Living Fund to empower community-led projects that support local residents through the cost of living crisis.

The challenge

Organisations in Elmbridge have seen an increased demand for local voluntary, community, and faith sector services due to the cost of living challenges residents are experiencing. The aim of the funding is to enable organisations to meet this demand and help those in most need. To date, over £300,000 has been allocated to such projects over two rounds of funding, with a further £100,000 ringfenced for Round 3.

The approach

Elmbridge Borough Council's Vision for 2030 is a sustainable, thriving Elmbridge driven by the power of our community. All decisions made by the council are built upon this principle. To tackle the cost of living pressures affecting our residents, we utilised our role as a community leader, convenor, and connector to engage and empower our communities.

We quickly established a Steering Group to oversee the cost of living work in the borough. Having a steering group helped to coordinate activity and provide a focus. This group is made up of representatives from Elmbridge Borough Council, Walton Charity, Citizens Advice, local housing associations and charities. In retrospect a mapping exercise of the grants available for organisations and reviewing what other grants organisations receive at this stage would have facilitated a more holistic approach enabling the funds to reach smaller, grassroots organisations faster.

The Steering Group meets on a quarterly basis to bring together key organisations to oversee the cost of living response in the borough and decide how best to allocate the council's funding. It also provides these partners space to share information and act as a sounding board for future ideas. This in turn was complimented by the work of the operational Partnership Group which ensured the support was able to be delivered, creating strong, progressive partnerships for the greater good of the borough.

Additionally, we ran networking events, including our cost of living roundtable event in November 2023. This brought together third sector and public sector partners to highlight the work to support vulnerable residents and to show how the council's cost of living funding had been spent. It also provided a space to reflect and collaborate on how best to support residents moving forward. These comments were collated and taken forward to the Steering Group meeting for implementation.

The Elmbridge Cost of Living Fund enables groups within our community to directly assist residents with managing the rising cost of living. We wanted to remove any red tape and provide a quick turnaround for the groups involved. As such, the applications are assessed promptly by the Steering Group, and then by our internal Council Management Board. We

made the application process as straightforward as possible and ensured it was well communicated to all stakeholders, and in particular the faith community who play an important role.

So far Elmbridge has run two rounds of cost of living funding for projects supporting families in the borough. Applications were accepted from external partners including non-for-profit organisations, third sector and faith organisations, and unregistered community groups. In each funding round, we tweaked the application criteria to balance the views of the Steering Group and of organisations working on the front line. Going forward, we see the need to consider multi-year funding to ensure funded projects have some stability without the need to keep applying to the council year-on-year.

Accordingly, opportunities and encouragement need to be provided to smaller charities to apply and benefit from the funding.

The outcome

The first round of funding at the start of 2023 had twelve successful applications, totalling £214,000. Projects which benefited included:

- meals for young carers
- provisions for a summer holiday foodbank
- employee training in helping residents with benefits applications and housing advice
- activities to alleviate social isolation
- new seating to increase the provision at a free community breakfast event.

The second round of funding in the second half of 2024 had eleven successful applications, totalling £91,000. Projects funded in this round included:

- additional support staff in schools for students with challenging personal issues
- food vouchers, respite care and medical equipment for residents
- school uniform, bedding and buggies to families
- subsidised counselling sessions.

The funded projects have been effective in helping to maximise residents income, providing much needed benefit support, breakfast clubs, meals for carers and more to generally improve people's wellbeing.

Following the success of the first two rounds, Elmbridge is running a third round of cost of living funding with £100,000 available to projects directly supporting residents through the cost of living crisis. This round of funding has a focus on smaller, unregistered charities, to boost their grassroots effect in local communities.

Elmbridge have also recently recruited a Community Partnerships Officer whose role it will be to continue to build upon the success of the cost of living support. The plan is to build

upon this by ensuring that residents and businesses are represented and involved in the commissioning of services to ensure they are reflective of the issues being faced.

Elmbridge provided further cost of living support by delegating £50,000 to Walton Charity in 2022 which was used to support a wide range of initiatives provided through organisations such as Oasis Charity and Three Rivers Academy.

In December 2023, Elmbridge provided funding to our three foodbanks to the value of £2500 which included vouchers for items in the Christmas hampers.

Elmbridge is also committing an additional £150,000 to the Household Support Fund to boost the payments to vulnerable households later this year.