

Cost-of-living motion

The Council notes:

- Inflation has hit a 40-year high of 9.1%, with the cost of staple foods rising by 13%¹
- Electricity prices are set to rise by 54%
- Rents in the South west have increased by 18% since 2020.

The combination of these factors, as well as factors such as the rising cost of petrol, which has now reached £2 a litre, has left people struggling to make ends meeting. Women are disproportionately affected by the rise in the cost-of-living². Equally, research has found that people from racially diverse backgrounds are more likely to struggle paying bills, rent, or mortgages than people from white backgrounds³, and disabled people will also be disproportionately affected by the increase in the cost-of-living⁴. This shows the cost-of-living crisis could have a profound, negative affect on Bristol's efforts to create a more equal, fairer society.

The rising cost-of-living is exacerbated by continued cuts to benefits. The £34 billion cut from benefits spending by successive Governments has resulted in increased poverty - a figure that will likely increase due to inflation and real-terms benefits cuts. The continued wage stagnation and rise in insecure working conditions, meaning inflation has a stronger impact on people's discretionary income. Between 1992 and 2008, real wages went up by 36%; for 2008 to 2024 a rise of just 2.4% is expected. Currently, 2.8% of all workers in the United Kingdom were on a zero-hours contract, compared with just 0.4% in the mid-2000s.

This has contributed to an increase in the use of foodbanks, with some 15% of people using food banks are thought to be in employment, with reliance on foodbanks up at least 25% compared to pre-pandemic levels.

~~The Labour administration has implemented a number of measures to help mitigate the impact of the cost of living crisis. These include suspending the eviction of council tenants, maintaining the Council Tax Reduction Scheme rate at 100%, and introducing the No Cold Homes strategy, which puts the city on track to eliminating fuel poverty by 2028 – among many other things.~~

This Council believes:

There is a cost-of-living crisis in the UK.

There is a rent crisis in the UK, which compounds the impact of the cost-of-living crisis for the 58,000 households in Bristol in private rented accommodation.

~~This cost-of-living crisis' effect on the worst-off has been exacerbated by a decade of austerity, first imposed by the Conservative / Liberal Democrat coalition, and continued by successive Conservative Governments.~~

The Government U-turn on ~~Labour's~~ the oppositions demands for a windfall tax on energy firms is welcome, needed, long overdue. However, further work is needed to help the worst-off during the

¹ Linsell, Ramnarayan, Goodman. May, 2022. 'Supermarket Food Price Increase Above UK Inflation in Cost of Living Crisis'. Bloomberg.

² Living Wage Foundation. May, 2022. 'Low paid work and cost-of-living crisis disproportionately affecting women'

³ People Like Us, May 2022.

⁴ Research Institution for Disabled Consumers, 2019.

cost-of-living crisis both in the immediate and in the long term, through work to eradicate poverty from the UK.

Therefore, this Council resolves to:

- Follow other leading authorities, such as London, and declare a 'Cost of Living Emergency' to highlight the massively difficult situation many residents are currently facing
- Invest the £4900,000 that is being added to the Mayor's Office budget to the Local Crisis Prevention Fund to help those most in need.
- Create a 'Cost of Living Hub' an online resource offering practical and financial advice to struggling Bristolians
- Convene a local Cost of Living Emergency Summit, inviting stakeholders such as Citizen's Advice, food banks, trade unions, charities and other partners to help address the current crisis
- To develop a 'One City' regular system of partnership reporting to help track impact of the crisis at ward level to grow our evidence base for our needs analysis and so we can target our response accurately.
- Work with community and voluntary organisations to develop our community response, building on what already exists and taking a social justice approach. Ideas include a network of welcoming space where people can spend time, have access to Wi-Fi, free activities and support
- Work with council staff and VCSE organisations to roll out signposting training to ensure we maximise opportunities to inform and support residents in crisis and direct them towards services that can advise on saving money on heating bills, employment and skills and wellbeing support.
- Support the development of a 'Pledge My ~~Check~~-Cheque' type scheme, where beneficiaries of the £400 relief grant who do not need the additional financial support can donate it to organisations that do, and promote this scheme through the Council's social media and websites.
- Work to expand the use of the Council's reuse shops, which provide people with cheap household items and supporting our circular economy principles.
- Build on our work as a Living Wage City, by encouraging businesses throughout Bristol to ~~end-reduce~~ the use of zero-hour contracts and instead give employees more secure, fairly paid employment.
- Continue to protect the Council Tax Reduction Scheme in full, ensuring the people most affected by the cost-of-living crisis do not have to pay any Council Tax.
- Continue to protect children's centres and nurseries as a priority when faced with real-terms Government funding cuts to Local Authorities.
- Call on Party Group Leaders to lobby the Government to:
 - Keep benefit payments in line with inflation, in a system similar to the state pension 'triple lock'.
 - Continue to provide free school meals during school holidays and for it to expand eligibility to include anyone in receipt of Universal Credit.
 - Immediately cut VAT from 20% to 17.5%, saving the average family £600 per year

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