

 <b>GIG CYMRU NHS WALES</b>	Iechyd Cyhoeddus Cymru Public Health Wales	<b>Name of Meeting</b> Board <b>Date of Meeting</b> 29 September 2022 <b>Agenda item:</b> 3.1
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## Public Health Wales Response to the Cost of Living Crisis

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<b>Approval/Scrutiny route:</b>	Cost of Living Crisis Coordination Internal Group Business Executive Team

### Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to:

- Provide an update to the Board on the co-ordinated response which is taking place within Public Health Wales to the Cost of Living Crisis (CoL)
- Briefly outline the key challenges and the public health response required.

### Recommendation:

APPROVE <input type="checkbox"/>	CONSIDER <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	RECOMMEND <input type="checkbox"/>	ADOPT <input type="checkbox"/>	ASSURANCE <input type="checkbox"/>
The Board are asked to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>consider</b> the approach outlined to respond to the Cost of Living crisis and seeks support to promote this framework for a public health response.</li> </ul>				

**Link to Public Health Wales [Strategic Plan](#)**

Public Health Wales has an agreed strategic plan, which has identified seven strategic priorities and well-being objectives.

This report contributes to the following:

<b>Strategic Priority/Well-being Objective</b>	All Strategic Priorities/Well-being Objectives
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**Summary impact analysis**

<b>Equality and Health Impact Assessment</b>	An Equality and Health Impact Assessment is not necessary at this stage, as no decision is required.
<b>Risk and Assurance</b>	N/A
<b>Health and Care Standards</b>	This report supports and/or takes into account the <a href="#">Health and Care Standards for NHS Wales</a> Quality Themes  Theme 1 - Staying Healthy Theme 7 - Staff and Resources Person Centred Care
<b>Financial implications</b>	N/A
<b>People implications</b>	N/A

## 1. Purpose / situation

The purpose of this paper is to:

- Provide an update to the Board on the co-ordinated response which is taking place within Public Health Wales to the Cost of Living Crisis (CoL);
- Briefly outline the key challenges and the public health response required.

## 2. Background

People's **wages and welfare payments are not keeping pace with rising living costs**, in particular, the costs of energy, fuel, housing, and food. Businesses and public services are also seeing their **budgets stretched** in the face of rising costs. This is referred to as the 'cost of living crisis'.

The crisis means more people are unable to afford the essentials, such as food and heating, which has **significant and wide-ranging negative impacts on mental and physical health**. These can have **long-term consequences** for the people affected and the systems and services that are needed to support them.

People living in the poorest parts of Wales already die more than six years earlier than those in the least deprived areas, and **the cost of living crisis will accelerate what were already increasing inequalities in health between those with more and less money**.

The current cost of living crisis is not just a temporary economic squeeze: **it is a long-term public health issue affecting the whole population**. The impact on health and well-being in Wales has the potential to put it on the same scale as the COVID-19 pandemic, which had already exacerbated existing inequalities in Wales. The cost of living crisis will worsen existing inequalities in health and well-being through a variety of different mechanisms.

## 3. Description/Assessment

The Cost of Living Crisis Coordination Group was set up by Public Health Wales in August to enable a joined up organisational response to the CoL crisis. This group is Co-Chaired by Professor Mark Bellis and Iain Bell and meets on a weekly basis. There is senior representation from all Directorates across Public Health Wales and this group has scoped out the current organisational activity and developed a briefing paper for Ministers which outlines a public health response, highlighting the urgent public health response in order to 1) mitigate the effects of the immediate crisis;

and 2) tackle the underlying causes so that health, well-being and inequality are improved in the longer-term.

We are developing resources to ensure our response is based on the latest available data and intelligence, both from within Wales and internationally. Examples include:

- International seminar with World Health Organization (Regions for Health Network)
- International Horizon Scanning report
- Monthly population panel survey
- Welsh Health Equity Solutions Platform
- Provide advice and support on Health Impact Assessments
- Ongoing monitoring
- Data modelling

A public health response to the CoL crisis needs to:

- Recognise the **immediate threat** the cost of living crisis poses to health and well-being, with a greater focus on **supporting those who will be hardest hit**.
- Prioritise **preventative action**: the negative impacts of events such as the cost of living crisis – and the COVID-19 pandemic before that – are so significant because they push on the existing vulnerabilities of entrenched poverty and inequity in Wales. Tackling the underlying causes of these will create a healthier and more equal society and, therefore, one more resilient to future challenges.

Wales is in a unique position to maximise the policy levers already in place by utilising and maximising the impact of the **Well-being of Future Generations Act 2015, the Socio-economic Duty, the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014** and the 'health in all policies' approach. Public Health Wales has a key role in promoting and supporting the implementation of these acts in the response to the CoL crisis.

It is proposed that in the **short term** this includes:

- A focus on mental health and well-being support;
- Income maximisation (including specific support on energy, housing and food costs) and debt support;
- Efforts to reduce Fuel poverty and the impact of cold homes,
- Efforts to prevent homelessness,

- Efforts to promote healthy eating,
- Maintain and improve equity of access to public services and protect against social isolation;
- Employers supporting staff, including careful management of redundancy;
- Health and care system stakeholders preparing for winter pressures; and
- Safeguarding against an increased risk of violence and domestic abuse.

In the **medium/long term** this includes:

- Energy efficiency measures and a shift to affordable, green energy;
- Improving housing availability, affordability and quality;
- Developing healthy and sustainable local food systems;
- Encouraging active, low-carbon travel and public transport;
- Promoting fair work; and
- Violence prevention initiatives and parenting support.

To **create a healthier and more equal Wales longer-term**, this includes:

- Implementing 'health in all policies';
- Taking a life-course approach with a focus on early years;
- Promoting healthy behaviours;
- Building community resilience, community cohesion and social capital; and Creating an 'Economy of Well-being'

Public Health Wales can support and enable a public health approach to the CoL crisis through its roles as an **employer, service provider and partner within the health and care system in Wales**.

Maintaining the health and well-being of our staff is a priority. Our flexible working policy enables staff to take the financial aspects of where they work from into account. We are also signposting staff to financial support and ensuring they can access mental well-being services.

For members of the public who use our screening services, we are seeking to minimise travel distances where appropriate, and are developing resources to provide information on support available to attend appointments.

The Board will receive regular updates on the ongoing activity and response to the CoL crisis.

#### 4. Recommendation

The Board are asked to:

- **consider** the approach outlined to respond to the Cost of Living crisis and seeks support to promote this framework for a public health response.