

RUGBY BOROUGH COUNCIL
QUESTION PURSUANT TO STANDING ORDER 10
COUNCIL – 13 DECEMBER 2023
QUESTION C

Councillor Alison Livesey to ask the Communities, Home, Digital and Communication Portfolio Holder, Councillor Tim Willis:

"When will the Financial Inclusion Strategy, due for publication in December 2022, be published?"

Councillor Willis, Communities, Home, Digital and Communication Portfolio Holder, provided the following response:

"A standalone financial inclusion strategy has not been published as was set out in the Housing Strategy, adopted in March 2022. Global events have had a substantial impact on the wider economic outlook and our work has focussed on supporting communities with information, signposting and advice relating to matters such as the cost-of-living.

More broadly, banks, other financial institutions and utilities companies have rapidly continued to enhance their financial inclusion offers to households. These organisations also have a far wider audience reach than the council.

The Council has progressed multiple thematic works that all add up to more broadly securing improved financial outcomes for residents of the borough.

Comprehensive cost of living help for households and businesses is available via the Councils web pages <https://www.rugby.gov.uk/w/help-for-households-and-businesses> This help includes:

- Debt management and money advice including mortgage / rent arrears and guidance on budgeting
- Utilities advice including energy, water, phone and broadband packages
- Services offered by the Rugby Credit Union –including affordable loans, online banking services and flexible savings accounts
- Support in relation to food, through the Rugby Foodbank and Free School Meals
- Support with home furnishing

In January 2023, a cross party scrutiny subgroup reported substantial assurance in respect of the cost-of-living work being delivered by the Council, underpinned by a robust action plan. Targeted interventions arising from this work have included:

- Our continued support of the local VCS through grants including the Rugby Foodbank, the New Bilton Community Association, The Benn Partnership, Newbold Community Association, Overslade Community Association, Brownsover Community Association and Long Lawford Community Association. The Grant Agreements considered by Cabinet on 4 December

2023 set out the objectives for this funding, including specifically tackling financial exclusion.

- Continuation of the Council's contract with CAB to provide financial advice and income maximisation support to residents.
- Supporting 86 vulnerable households to access highly energy efficient white goods via the UK Shared Prosperity Fund to help them to manage utility costs.
- Ongoing work to increase access to high quality and energy efficient affordable homes through the regeneration of Biart Place – the groundbreaking for this new 100 home development will take place this week
- Successfully securing grant funding via the Local Authority Housing delivery fund (LADS) which resulted in the installation of energy efficiency measures into 39 homes. Act on Energy complemented this project by offering residents energy advice.
- Delivering energy performance improvements to 112 solid wall properties in Rokeby and Long Lawford utilising £1.1m of Council funding match funded by a government grant of £1.1m.

Moving forward, the Area Action work, agreed as part of the Corporate Strategy Delivery Plan (CSDP), seeks to ensure a hyper- local approach to levelling up and in turn address the causes of multiple disadvantage in targeted areas.

As agreed in the CSDP, this work will begin with pilot projects in the Benn and New Bilton Wards. The Benn and New Bilton Wards have been chosen as they overlap with one of the Borough's Lower Super Output Areas (LSOA) which is in the national top 20% most deprived and thus statistically experiences the greatest disadvantage. There are two LSOAs in Rugby in the top 20% most deprived, the other is Brownsover North & Lakeland South and whilst some of the current work extends to this location, the intention is to take learning from these pilot Area Action projects and apply it to other locations around the Borough as the overall project progresses.

Area Action seeks to implement a holistic approach to tackling disadvantage, recognising that in many cases issues such as health inequality, financial exclusion, digital exclusion and other social factors can be interconnected. This work will progress with the engagement of ward councillors and a further report to Cabinet in February 2024.

Recognising that there is not a standalone Financial inclusion Strategy, as was the original intention nearly two years ago and that much has changed since this original commitment, I would be pleased to provide you with a full update on the work in progress and completed which all contributes to the broader financial well-being of our residents."