

**Public
Key Decision - No**

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Title: Warm Spaces

Meeting/Date: Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Customers and Partnerships) – 3rd November 2022

Executive Portfolio: Executive Councillor for Community and Health

Report by: Corporate Director – People and Programme Manager

Wards affected: All

Executive Summary:

As set out in the Community (Transition) Strategy 2021-23, Huntingdonshire District Council are committed to supporting their residents through a positive and ongoing working relationship with local communities. There is an immediate and pressing need to provide support via the district's established community network throughout the cost-of-living crisis particularly during the challenging winter months ahead.

Warm Spaces have been recognised nationally as a network of community provisions that can offer people a safe and warm local facility, where they can gather for free and possibly enjoy refreshments and activities. Huntingdonshire District Council have been working with local communities to identify possible Warm Spaces across the district. An offer of guidance, financial support, and training have been developed to ensure anyone using a Warm Space (volunteer or resident) is safe and well supported.

The Huntingdonshire network of Warm Spaces also offers an opportunity to engage and support residents before they get into crisis. Working with a wide range of internal HDC services and external partners, a proposed pathway of support will be piloted, and the learning used to inform a wider multi-agency approach for the short and medium term.

RECOMMENDATION:

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel is invited to comment on the development of Warm Spaces in response to the cost-of-living crisis. A presentation will be made to the Panel at the meeting and a report has been produced with further information.

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. The purpose of the report is to present the approach to support Huntingdonshire residents during the winter, through a network of safe and warm community facilities (Warm Spaces). Recognising that local community groups are best placed to identify the specific needs of their local residents and are able to respond quickly and appropriately, the District Council's role is to coordinate, support and promote the initiative rather than to directly deliver the provision.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1. The COVID pandemic identified a number of strengths across local communities, namely that they were best placed to respond to the immediate needs of their residents quickly and appropriately. The strong desire and ability for community enablement has been evoked again over the last few months, recognising that many people will find themselves in significant financial hardships during winter, where the cost of everyday essentials (bills, food, etc), will increase faster than household incomes.
- 2.2. Although the data to support the cost-of-living crisis on local residents does not demonstrate a significant impact, the District Council does not want to wait until people are in crisis. National data analysis suggests there are emerging trends for our residents that we need to mitigate now:
- [prices for everyday grocery items](#) in the United Kingdom have increased by 17% in the last year
 - [petrol and diesel prices](#) have risen by over 50% in the last two years
 - [the energy price cap](#) for the average UK household has risen from £1,138 in April 2021 to £3,549 in October 2022, a 211% increase. The recently announced lower cap of £2,500 is subject to uncertainty amid changes in national government leadership
 - [private rental prices](#) paid by tenants in the UK rose by 3.6% in the 12 months to September 2022
 - [inflation](#) has been increasing in recent months, causing real pay growth rates to significantly decrease
- 2.3. As a response to these expected cost-of-living pressures, many Local Authorities have investigated how they can support their local residents through a network of Warm Spaces.
- 2.4. Warm Spaces are commonly described as **'places where people can gather for free in a warm, safe, welcoming place and maybe enjoy a hot drink and some company'**
- 2.5. The model for a Warm Space is to utilise a community facility to offer drinks and/or food for local residents during specific timed sessions. They are predominantly run by volunteers, possibly with activities available to encourage residents to attend and to provide a focus for the time they are there. Community providers such as town and parish councils, churches, village hall committees and third sector providers are commonly the types of organisations offering Warm Spaces in their local areas.

3. WARM SPACES IN HUNTINGDONSHIRE

- 3.1. A recent motion for a cost-of-living and climate crisis was passed at the Full Council meeting on 12th October 2022, recognising that both are interlinked and jointly require attention to ensure the wellbeing of local people and businesses.
- 3.2. Huntingdonshire District Council is committed to supporting local communities to identify, address and respond to the needs of their local residents i.e.: with local people, by local people, for local people.
- 3.3. The model for Warm Spaces across the district places the District Council as the enabler and promoter of the provision rather than to directly deliver the facilities and volunteers. The HDC model allows local communities to respond in the most appropriate way but also builds community sustainability, allowing groups to continue their local offers for as long as they are needed. This reduces the risk and limitation of being wholly and directly funded by HDC.
- 3.4. Communities who identify a need for a Warm Space will take the lead in the set up and running of the provision. While support from HDC will be available it will be at the discretion of the individual organisations about how to scale their Warm Space depending on the number of local residents attending. If the uptake is very low the community will need to decide whether it is viable to continue.
- 3.5. HDC will keep the number and location of Warm Spaces across the district under regular review. If there are known to be high need areas where Warm Space provision has not been identified, proactive discussion will be undertaken with Councillors and local support organisations to identify how residents can be better supported.

There are three phases of delivery for Warm Spaces in Huntingdonshire:

- 3.6. **Network of locations.** Community groups who wish to offer a Warm Space have been invited to record their Expression of Interest to HDC via an [online form](#). The form has been circulated via the network of Parish and Town council Chairs and Clerks, a network of recognised community and voluntary sector organisations and the Diocese of Ely. Further promotion has been through press releases, radio interviews and social media.
- 3.7. Organisations who consider they are ready to offer a Warm Space immediately are required to complete a registration form (**Appendix 1**) to assure HDC they have the necessary controls in place to ensure the safety of all those attending the Warm Space i.e.: both volunteers and residents. Organisations are also required to detail their facilities along with the times and activities they offer.
- 3.8. Registration forms that are completed and returned will be verified before the details of the Warm Space are published and promoted on the HDC [Warm Spaces website page](#).
- 3.9. **Support for the provision.** Some organisations may identify the need for a Warm Space in their local community but are unable to cover costs for additional heating, insurance, activities or refreshments. The need for financial support has been identified by a number of community groups across the district.

- 3.10. Organisations wishing to apply for funding have been directed to the established grant application process of the [Community Chest Fund](#). The Community Chest funding panel have agreed a cap of up to £500 per Warm Space to support with any additional overheads incurred. In addition, the panel have agreed to meet more frequently than the current 4-week cycle if the number of applications for Warm Spaces funding requires a timelier response.
- 3.11. A programme of training is also on offer to support the volunteers in Warm Spaces. A range of short online training sessions have been circulated to organisations ([suicide training](#), [safeguarding training](#)) with an offer of longer and more in-depth training being made available if/when volunteers identify a requirement in their provision based on the needs of the local residents.
- 3.12. ***Prevention and Early Intervention***. Warm Spaces offer a unique opportunity to support residents who have emerging needs before they fall into crisis.
- 3.13. Building on a previously successful HDC project to identify key changes and life events that can trigger a crisis, funded by Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government (MHCLG) in 2020/21, a proposed pathway of support has been drafted and circulated (***Appendix 2***). To date the responses have been of overwhelming support from a range of internal services (Housing needs, Revenues and Benefits, Communities, Customer Services) and external partners (Citizens Advice Bureau, DWP, Primary Care Networks, Acute and Mental Health services, Age UK, Think Communities).
- 3.14. A workshop with representatives from the agencies and services listed above, along with representation from the community and voluntary groups was held on 28th October to assess the viability of the model and identify an approach to pilot the pathway. All partners agreed the essential need for holistic and active support, otherwise a bottleneck will be created further in the system.
- 3.15. It is expected that most Warm Spaces will be identified within October and November 2022 in order to be fully operational from December onwards. The review of the Warm Spaces provision, ensure gaps are identified and addressed, will commence in mid-November.

4. LINK TO THE CORPORATE PLAN/COUNCIL PRIORITIES

- 4.1 The model of Warm Spaces delivers priority areas of work, as set out in the HDC Corporate Plan 2022/23, for two of the Council's objectives: **Supporting the needs of residents** and **Strengthening our communities**.
- 4.2 In addition, the model of collaboration with partners and residents directly delivers against the Council's overarching principle 'Working together' to achieve better services and outcomes for residents.

5. CONSULTATION

- 5.1 The development of Warm Spaces has multi-agency support providing key stakeholders i.e.: members of community groups, Town and Parish Councillors, Hunts Forum, Think Communities, Health services and a range of internal HDC services, the opportunity to inform and influence the model.
- 5.2 The model remains iterative and will be continually evaluated to reflect the support provided by the organisations offering Warm Spaces, the partners supporting and the needs of the local residents.

- 5.3 HDC has established a network of colleagues working to deliver Warm Spaces across the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority. This has supported the transparency of offers from each district, shared learning and good practice and been able to support residents who live along district borders.

6. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 There are no direct legal implications from this report

7. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 There is a likely additional project management resource requirement to maintain and develop the support HDC is able to offer to the local communities. The suggested funding for this would be through the use of reserve funding to support vulnerable residents.

8. HEALTH IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 Early partnership discussions with health have identified Warm Spaces as an opportunity for community health support e.g.: social prescribers to attend and be available to support residents with emerging health needs. A potential pilot area is being identified to assess how effectively this would work and how this health support could be scaled across the district.
- 8.2 A number of organisations are planning to offer low level physical activities e.g.: chair-based exercise to those attending Warm Spaces. The wider health benefits of interacting with other local residents also aims to mitigate the negative impacts of loneliness and social isolation for some residents.

9. REASON FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 9.1 To brief Overview and Scrutiny Panel members on the district's offer of Warm Space support for our residents as a response to the cost-of-living crisis.

LIST OF APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: WARM SPACES REGISTRATION FORM

APPENDIX 2: PROPOSED PATHWAY OF SUPPORT TO RESIDENTS

BACKGROUND PAPERS:

Community (Transition) Strategy 2021-23

<https://applications.huntingdonshire.gov.uk/moderngov/documents/s117477/5.%20Community%20Transition%20Strategy%202021%202023%20Covering%20Report.pdf>

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