



COST OF LIVING SUMMIT 2023

Wednesday 4 October 2023

Following on from October 2022's summit, delegates once again met to look at how we respond to the cost-of-living crisis and its impact on the residents in Southampton. The summit gathered to share good practice, connections, offers, and form new partnerships.

Warm spaces

Central Library

- Central Library is a warm space – as are other library spaces.
- Had between 30-50 warm welcome activities in 2022/23.
- Provided a range of activities, which included:
 - Existing services – such as story time or reading groups.
 - Games – such as scramble or chess. These activities were discovered to be the most popular.
- Activities were set up with existing resources and a small grant provided by Southampton City Council for refreshments.
- Has a partnership with Citizens Advice where users can go into a pod and talk to Citizens Advice via a video call. This service was very popular.
- Discovered that places like libraries, churches, and the Saints Foundation, were already running something and these were more successful because the community felt more comfortable going to these rather than a new 'warm space'.

Saint Mary's Church (SO14)

- Out of last year's summit, made connections and established a meeting space.
- Discovered the issue many faced is not necessarily food, but loneliness.

- Founded a warm space during the academic term times; the launch of the warm space went well and provided afternoon team, scramble, and community.
- Re-launching warm space for the 2023/24 academic year.

Individual delegates

- Central Library inspired some organisations to open a space where there is a table of essential items, such as cup of soup and sanitary requirements. The service does not have to ask for these, they can simply pick up what they need.
- Some older people have been very well looked after by Southampton City Council, such as building for older people who want to continue living independently but have some needs they would like help with. These buildings have restaurants and people are encouraged to get together for activities. However, due to the cost-of-living crisis, the Council has given residents four weeks' notice that the restaurants are closing – a decision which is concerning many.
 - Response provided: Southampton City Council have advised that the restaurants are not cost effective. It has been requested that they visit the residents in their communal areas and speak to them directly about the decision.
- There are a lot of community projects going on, but there is a question of how to let the community know about these projects. If you do not know about it, you are not going to access it.
 - SO:Linked – getting the message out is an incredibly difficult task. Messages are sent out every month, word is spread through networking events and various networking group, and there is a website people can use a directory (paper copies also available).
 - Suggestions – advertising through the Daily Echo and on radio stations; putting posters up on the towers.

How do we build on last year?

- There is a national mapping site where organisations can list their warm space – warmwelcome.uk. Get everyone using this.
- Transport issues need to be addressed – there are several people who would use the warm spaces available but cannot get to them.
 - Social Care in Action – has additional capacity to get people to warm spaces and are proud to help them do so.
- More networks need to be put in place where organisations can give information – for example, a primary school network.

Energy

Citizens Advice - the national picture

- Increase in Personal Independence Payments.
- Increase in energy support.
- Increase in energy debts.
- Increase in charitable support and food banks.
- Increase in Council Tax arrears.
- There has been a steady increase since January 2020 in the number of people helped with homelessness by the Citizens Advice Network. August 2023 saw the highest number on record.

Advice in Southampton

- The partnership support around 16,000 clients through 60,000 interactions and helped Southampton residents gain almost £3 million.
- The partners:
 - Citizens Advice Southampton
 - The Environment Centre (tEC)
 - No Limits
 - CLEAR Project Southampton
 - SENDIASS Southampton (Rose Road Association)
 - Age UK Southampton

Citizens Advice - the Southampton picture

- A similar picture to the national one.
- Charitable support and food banks are the highest support area.
- All areas of crisis can be linked to the negative budgets impacting average members of our society.
- The number of people accessing crisis support is almost 500% higher than September 2022.
- Trends indicate that the number of people needing a food bank voucher or alike will increase.

The Environment Centre (tEC)

- A service available to all but prioritises those most at risk from the impact of living in a cold home.
- April – September 2023:
 - Helped more than 1,200 households: estimated savings of over £615,000.
 - 58% increase compared to 2022.
 - 125% increase compared 2021.
- Survey highlighted a need to reach young adults, families with children under 5, and communities with English as a second language.
 - Working with No Limits to create a home energy check list for young adults living independently for the first time.
 - Created a children's activity pack to engage young families.
 - Produced and translated A Guide to Home Energy in Dari, in partnership with Southampton City Council and CLEAR Project Southampton.

Student welfare

Challenges for students

- A recent report by Higher Education Policy Institute highlights:
 - More students work longer hours in paid employment, at the growing cost of their studies.
 - 76% of universities help their students with food and drink.
 - 27% now run food banks.
 - 82% have an online platform to communicate their support to students.
- Recommendations from the report:
 - A cost-of-living working group to be set up at universities.
 - Student Union's to encourage universities to act, creating a campaign.
 - The government to launch a cost-of-living task force which reviews the level of maintenance support provided.

Greatest impacts on students

- The cost-of-living crisis is having a negative impact on students' mental health and wellbeing.
- Over 90% are facing financial difficulties because of the crisis.
- Rent and food have been reported as the most significant cost pressure.
- 25% have reported spending more money than they expected at university, commenting on the severe impact this is having on their mental health, social life, and ability to manage studying alongside working to afford university.
- 57% of students reported working part-time; 2% full-time.
- Many students go without meals because they cannot afford it, but also because they do not have the time between studying and working.
- Students' grades are slipping because they are not making it to lectures or their attention is there during lectures because they are exhausted from work.

Additional support for students

- The maintenance loan from the Student Loans Company is not much and parents are expected to pick up the costs. However, many parents have advised that they are unable to do so.
- A range of additional financial support is available at each university, including:
 - Additional targeted bursaries.
 - Technology bursaries to support the purchasing of IT equipment.
 - Support grants to help with general financial difficulties – for example, commuters; those with dependents.
 - Laptop loans.
 - Warm areas of the university advertised over the winter period.
 - Food pantries.

What can we do as a group to further support students?

- Equip students with the tools to manage their money – particularly relevant to international students who will experience a currency value difference.
- Need to stop treating the symptoms of mental health issues and go to the source.
- There are a lot of resources available, but the problem is engagement – there is a need to target how to drive engagement.
- Students are sometimes treated as ‘other’ and this needs to be addressed – they are just as much part of the community as everyone else.
- Lack of affordable housing needs to be addressed – landlords who are charging far too much need to be challenged.
- Creation of spaces where students can socialise, but it will not cost them a penny – would help with the socialising statistics and healthy eating.
- Find a way to combat the stigma around food banks.
- Creation of a project that links locals and university students.
- A food poverty network that involves upskilling and cooking lessons.

Health

- [Southampton Data Observatory - Cost of Living Survey: full results summary](#)
- Panel discussions mainly focused on how we can better educate our communities in eating more healthy based meals. Many food banks have access to healthy fresh products but there seems to be poor knowledge on how to use/cook with these. How can we better educate our families?
- Lots of great work is taking place across the city but there seems to be some duplication occurring – is there a way we can bring projects and groups together and streamline? Is there a central place where we can share opportunities, training, etc.?
- Discussions around the right places to start speaking to parents and children around healthy food was seen at starting with nurseries, however messaging needs to continue throughout a child's educational pathway. What programmes and initiatives are currently available to schools, family hubs etc.? Who is delivering these and is the messaging the same?
- Do we consider how we best use our rich languages across the city to get information to the right places? Who and where are the hearts of each community and are we engaging with them?

Offers of support

- Neil Lewis tiny toes day nursery – Lordshill, Shirley Warren – offer of space, cooking, food banks. Conduit to parents of early years children.
- Cooking and nutrition network – for details contact Becky.Wilkinson@southampton.gov.uk

- Provide a space at Saint Mary's Church.
- Happy to work in partnership with others to develop more meeting places across the city to reduce isolation/loneliness.
- Happy to host food nutrition/courses/educational workshops emilyburke@saintmarys.church
- Help with improving adult literacy – read easy Southampton contact southamptoncoordinator@readeasy.org.uk
- Oasis hub East Southampton have space via Harefield Hub and 2 secondary schools Karen.dawkins@oasisuk.org
- October Books community space – can signpost we have a community noticeboard and there is a lot that happens too for wellbeing and making connections in that space, Suzanne.

Outcomes

- An understanding that those who have not previously been exposed to levels of deprivation are now experiencing them in some form or another.
- There are numerous warm spaces available throughout Southampton.
- Everyone should be encouraged to the warmwelcome.uk.
- More effective communication about community projects required.
- Need to ensure the community can get to the warm spaces available.
- Cost-of-living crisis similar in Southampton to the national picture.
- Increase in charitable support and use of food banks in Southampton.
- Identified a need to engage young adults living independently for the first time, families with children under 5, and communities with English as their second language.
- Students severely impacted by the crisis.
- The maintenance loan from the Student Loans Company is not enough and many parents cannot afford to cover the difference.
- Universities provide a range of additional financial support to students.
- Lack of affordable housing needs to be addressed.
- There is a need to combat the stigma around food banks.
- Over half of students are working alongside their students to afford university, but there has been a negative impact on grades.
- Numerous offers of support given.
- Duplication of projects is occurring and way to bring these together needs to be looked at.
- There seems to be poor knowledge of how to use/cook healthy fresh products, so we need to find a way to better educate our families.