



Annual Review Meeting Report Wednesday 16th November 2022

Introduction

The theme of the recent Exeter Community Initiatives Annual Review Meeting held on Wednesday 16th November at the Palace Gate Centre was how we could work together to support people during the cost-of-living crisis. We recognised that ECI along with other charities will be faced with an increased demand for support arising from a crisis which will affect people, not just financially, but also have an impact on peoples' mental health.

ECI has always worked in partnership with other charities. We wanted to use our Annual Review Meeting to bring people together and explore how we could work together to tackle this latest crisis.

The meeting was attended by nearly 50 people with several representatives from local charities: CoLab, Age UK Exeter, St Petrock's, YMCA, Step One and Ride On as well as from local churches.

Councillor Martin Pearce (Exeter City Council), Councillor Su Aves (Devon County Council) and Nick Hawker (Exeter City Football Club Supporters Trust) were also in attendance.

What are the current issues for you or your organisation?

It was recognised that the cost-of-living crisis would not just bring pressures on people we work with but also for our own staff and volunteers many of whom are on low incomes or work part-time.

- *Mental Health – affects staff as well as those we support*
- *Cost of Living - affects staff and service users, some staff cannot afford to live locally, In-work poverty means we are all in the same boat*

It was also recognised it would lead to an increase in demand and complexity of cases charities were dealing with.

- *Our clients are anxious, often with complex needs*
- *Additional transport cost / buses for older people*

This may mean people are less likely to go out and engage which will make people more socially isolated.

It was also felt there would be increased pressures on charities themselves. The themes below were repeated by several charities:

- *Huge demand and not always possible to meet it*
- *Funding – we are being asked to do more with less and uncertainty of funding application success*
- *Loss of core funding*
- *Pressure on salaries*
- *Pay and retention of staff*
- *Loss of volunteers post Covid*
- *Donations dropping – need increasing*
- *Capacity – staff already working at full stretch*
- *Pressure to absorb failings of statutory services (and cuts to statutory services)*

What are you currently doing to address the issue?

The responses fell broadly into two categories: practical initiatives for clients and support for staff.

Several charities have given staff a pay rise:

- *Have given staff an early cost-of-living pay increase*
- *Pay rise, salary protection scheme*

Others focussed on staff wellbeing:

- *Created Wellbeing Hub*
- *Mental health support for individuals*
- *Supporting staff and volunteers – watching for signs of stress*
- *Wellbeing support for individuals*

For clients/ residents:

- *Pound stretching workshops – free and online (Transitions)*
- *Advice on maximising income*
- *Cost saving measures in our own homes – heated blankets and hot water bottles*
- *Prioritising – spending choices*
- *Providing connections to support*
- *Sharing Knowledge*

What for you are the opportunities for collaboration or partnership?

There was a general consensus around:

- *Sharing core funding / resources*
- *Sharing staff*
- *Supporting staff wellbeing*

The following suggestions were also made:

- *Creating a collaborative group focused on cost-of-living across Exeter (This could be based around the Exeter Community Wellbeing Team set up during the pandemic.)*
- *Up-to-date information online and on paper*
- *Referring between agencies.*

What new initiatives could be developed?

There were practical suggestions which participants talked about following up with others at the meeting.

- *Build alliances*
- *Lift sharing*
- *Food clubs*
- *Clothes swaps*
- *Reinvigorate Church co-operation – include non-conformist churches*
- *Extend voucher schemes to more partners*
- *Cross selling through charity shops – e.g. Ride On bikes in Jelly children's clothes shop*
- *Collaboration between charities and the co-work space Generator Hub (Quayside location) – contact Riina Lehtoviita—Community Manager*
- *Mental Health Innovation Fund – contact CoLab*

The charities present were determined to work together to tackle the cost-of-living crisis. Many new connections were made at the event. ECI and others will post regular updates through its website and social media.

Further information

Exeter City Council

Cost of Living advice including help with energy costs, debt, warm and community spaces, budgeting, claiming Universal Credit and access to the Household Support Fund.

<https://exeter.gov.uk/benefits-and-welfare/help-managing-your-money/cost-of-living-support/>

Devon County Council

Cost of Living advice including managing money, debt advice, energy savings and access to the Household Support Fund.

<https://www.devon.gov.uk/cost-of-living/>

Exeter Community Initiatives

For more information about ECI projects visit:

<https://www.eci.org.uk/>

For more information about networks including the Exeter Community Food Network visit:

<https://www.exeterconnect.org/>