



Cost of living crisis

Bristol's One City approach to supporting citizens and communities

What happened and key learning

November 2023 v1

Contents

Foreword.....	3
Executive summary	5
Introduction	6
Co-ordinated actions.....	8
Information and communication	9
Funding	13
Welcoming Spaces	15
Impact on communities	19
Community hubs.....	24
Access to advice and support	28
Mental health and emotional wellbeing.....	30
Volunteering	32
Working together as One City.....	35
The Community Exchange.....	35
One City co-ordination group	36
Mayor’s meetings with community workers	37
One Council Group.....	37
City Partners.....	37
One City, Many Communities	38
Challenges ahead - inequity and poverty forecast	41
Conclusion.....	43

Foreword

In the early summer of 2022, I met with community organisations and city partners to discuss the best approach to support communities most impacted by the rising cost of living. Together we knew that winter would be extremely difficult for many people, particularly those already on low incomes and experiencing poverty.

We agreed to set up a network of Welcoming Spaces, building on all the community and voluntary action that already happens across our city. Our shared goal was to be open and welcoming to all.

We initially had a target of creating 20 Welcoming Spaces. The response from our city was incredible. By April 2023, we had [a network of 105 Welcoming Spaces across our city](#). This network included community groups, community centres, faith spaces, care homes and leisure centres. [Watch a video to see our Welcoming Spaces in action](#).

Many of these spaces were operated entirely by hard-working volunteers but they still don't come free. Community spaces needed help to keep the heating and the lights on, to cover the cost of hot drinks, and in some cases, extend their opening hours. By working with city partners, we were able to secure funding through a private donor for 17 Welcoming Spaces which got us off to a great start. Funders and resources were invested in Bristol as a confirmation that the city's assets are able and trusted to do what is best for its residents. [When I visited one of the first Welcoming Spaces](#), I saw first-hand the energy and dedication from everyone involved to make it a warm and welcoming environment for all. City partners from the [advice](#), health, [energy](#), and food sectors also offered additional support to strengthen the response. It has been a true collective effort from everyone across our city.

We do not take this support for granted. I am acutely aware of the sustained pressure on citizens and community organisations as well as the wider public sector. It was therefore a privilege to welcome over 120 of the people involved in the response to City Hall in April 2023 to say thank you. It was a fantastic opportunity to hear from everyone that has been involved, and to thank them for their hard work and time.

Bristol was one of the first cities in the country to come up with a planned response to the national cost of living crisis for last winter. For that, we should be proud. This report describes what happened, and what we learned. The winter response was possible because of our One City approach: the relationships we have nurtured over time and the continued investment in building and strengthening community infrastructure over the long term.

The rising cost of living is still a serious problem. Poverty and inequity are growing. Bristol cannot solve this crisis alone and we need a serious response from national government. However, it is with stronger confidence that we are approaching the coming winter. We'll be developing our approach with partners in the coming weeks.

Thank you once again to everyone who has worked to make Bristol a city of hope.

Marvin

Marvin Rees
Mayor of Bristol



Executive summary

This report provides a summary of the actions that were taken by Bristol working as One City to respond to the national cost of living crisis between October 2022 and March 2023. It highlights the relationships between citizens, voluntary sector and social enterprises, public sector, and other actors, and how these underpinned the city's approach to the response.

The report briefly introduces the context of the cost of living crisis response, and its legacy. It contains the following key chapters.

Coordinated actions

An outline of how the citywide co-ordination happened, explaining how information was communicated and how actions were funded. Reflections and learning from the five key pillars of the cost of living response: Welcoming Spaces, community hubs, access to advice and support, access to mental health and emotional wellbeing resources, and volunteering.

Working together as One City

An overview of how the Bristol One City cost of living approach was delivered by a diverse network of many organisations and hundreds of people freely giving their time. Together, this network could better understand the impact of the cost of living crisis on citizens across diverse communities, find creative solutions and act in a coordinated manner.

One City, Many Communities

In April 2023, the Mayor invited all city partners involved in the One City response to a 'thank you' event at City Hall. This chapter summarises the reflections that came of this event, and the way of working together that attendees have mutually agreed to carry forward.

Challenges ahead

A brief forecast is provided, examining the factors that will continue to make the cost of living a key issue for Bristol communities in the foreseeable future.

Introduction

Context

The cost of living response in Bristol was set up to enable the city to come together in support of communities and residents through the challenging winter months between October 2022 and March 2023.

To enable the response, existing voluntary, social and community assets were built upon. Communities and residents were given the opportunity to take part in and contribute to shaping the response. A response plan was set out in [Bristol's One City approach to the cost of living crisis](#) and a case study of the One City approach was also shared on the [Local Government Association's website](#).

Bristol was able to respond quickly to the challenges posed by the cost of living crisis due to existing social foundations, including the One City approach. Suzanne Rolt, CEO of Quartet Community Foundation, said:

"In the face of a potentially overwhelming challenge, you need to draw upon everything, form a tight circle to protect what's within and fill it with as much knowledge and experience as you can. You form connections, you listen, and act as one: a One City response.¹"

The city saw communities mobilise to form a network of 105 Welcoming Spaces (WS). The response developed and co-ordinated new ways of working between different sectors, new ways of sharing information, and supplied more accessible funding opportunities to organisations best able to serve Bristol's citizens and communities.

Legacy

In April 2023, the Mayor invited people involved in the One City response to a 'thank you' event at City Hall. Reflecting during the event, Marvin Rees, The Mayor of Bristol, said:

'One of the outstanding things about Bristol is that we are a city of doers, people who 'can do' and who want to make a difference. We saw this so vividly during the pandemic. We are so fortunate to have a wealth of citizens, community and voluntary organisations and faith groups who offer a warm welcome every day. It is these community connections which strengthen communities, produce wellbeing and build our resilience as a city so that when we need to respond to a crisis or emergency we can.'²

The event was an opportunity to reflect on what the cost of living response had achieved in Bristol and discuss its legacy.

This report looks at what Bristol, working as One City, achieved through the cost of living response and what can be learned from it. It summarises feedback provided by 80 of the

¹ Quote taken from the One City cost of living response 'thank you' event held in April 2023.

² [Thank you to everyone who's helped support residents during the cost of living crisis - The Bristol Mayor](#)

Welcoming Spaces³. It also summarises findings from the cost of living event held at City Hall and presents an emerging One City, Many Communities approach.

³ Some of the findings from this feedback is shared within this report. The full analysis of the survey can be found in the report appendix.

Co-ordinated actions

Effectively supporting citizens and communities through Bristol's cost of living response required careful co-ordination between:

- individuals and communities
- voluntary, community and social enterprises
- business and industry
- Bristol City Council
- other institutions
- funders

This section of the report outlines how this co-ordination happened. It explains how information was communicated and how actions were funded. It then supplies reflections and learning on the five key pillars of the cost of living response: WSS, community hubs, access to advice and support, access to mental health and emotional wellbeing resources, and volunteering.

Information and communication

Communication with citizens and partners about the cost of living response was made possible through the network of organisations involved and through the One City approach. Working together, key messages were aligned throughout to ensure a consistent narrative was kept.

Different communication channels and platforms were used to ensure residents and communities could access and remain informed about support and resources available. WSS and community hubs developed their own communication campaigns reflecting their communities, being best able to understand what would be most effective within the communities they serve. WSS developed flyers and promotional materials to advertise their offers. They also shared information on their own websites and social media.



Image 1 Leaflets from WSs.

Bristol City Council developed a strategy looking to deliver proactive and targeted communications to residents and communities identified as being most at risk from the crisis, and proactively support the work of response partners. Messaging focused on:

- the national cost of living crisis and its impact on Bristol
- where to access support
- how we could all help each other

The council's communication focused on signposting residents to cost of living crisis support offered by local organisations, and on promoting the network of WSS. Other key communications supported efforts to recruit volunteers, connecting volunteers with local and partner organisations, and encouraging social action from residents.

Outcomes from Bristol City Council's communication strategy are supplied below.

Cost of living support website

One of the key aims of the Bristol City Council communication strategy was to achieve 20,000 views of the cost of living support webpage in the six months following its launch in August 2022. This number was based on the number of views that the council's COVID-19 support webpage achieved in its first six months (24,000 unique views).

In its first six months, the cost of living support webpage had reached 20,400 unique views. At the end of May 2023, the page had reached almost 26,000 unique views. Data from the webpage shows distinct peaks in demand. These include the announcement of the opening of WSs on the Mayor's blog, and spells of wintry weather that occurred before Christmas.

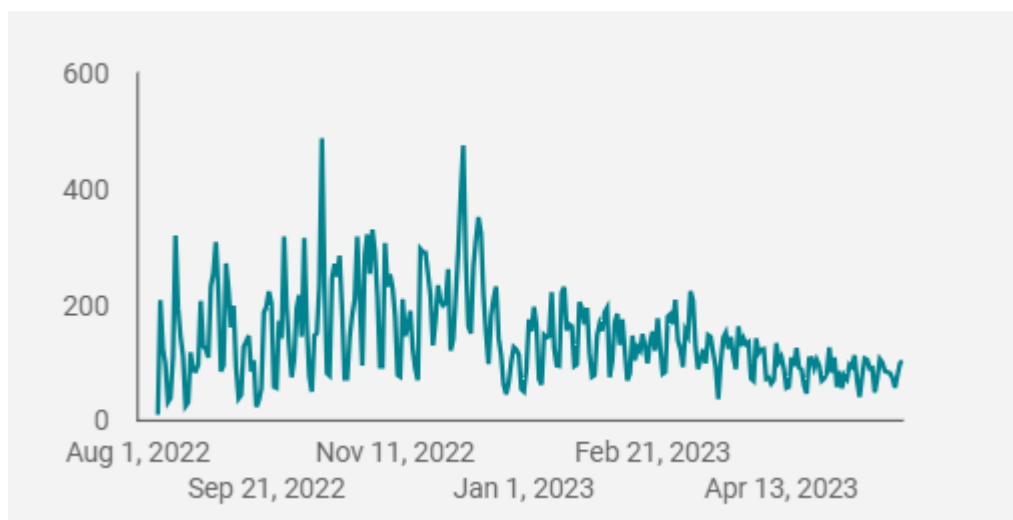


Figure 1 Graph showing visits to the support webpage from August 2022 to May 2023.

Social media

A cost of living crisis impact assessment⁴ produced by Bristol City Council highlighted disproportionate impacts upon ten geographical areas in Bristol, and various equality groups. Paid Facebook adverts were created to reach residents of those areas at specific times during the campaign. Adverts were run to signpost available support and local WSs when it was very cold, during the pre and post-Christmas period and when energy bills increased.

Simultaneously, regular content was shared on all the council's channels. Since September 2022, the council published 236 posts resulting in around 4,800 clicks through to the cost of living webpage, with an approximate reach of 193,200 people. Facebook was the most successful platform in terms of engagement with a rate of 2.47%, against an average of 0.5%-0.99% across channels.

Leaflets and posters

Coordinators worked with city partners and advice agencies to develop a leaflet that supplied advice and signposting to local organisations offering support on topics ranging from housing and financial advice to food and mental health. These leaflets were shared digitally with

⁴ <https://www.bristol.gov.uk/files/documents/6067-cost-of-living-crisis-impact-assessment-oct22/file>

partners, for them to distribute. Hard copies were given to Ws, community organisations, libraries, and leisure centres.

A poster signposting people to the cost of living support webpage and We Are Bristol helpline was also distributed to the above venues.



Need help with the cost of living?

 www.bristol.gov.uk/costofliving

 **0800 694 0184** (Mon to Fri, 8.30am-5pm)*

 **Visit the Citizen Service Point**
100 Temple Street, Bristol, BS1 6AG
(Mon, Tues, Thurs, Fri, 9am-5pm; Wed 10am-5pm)*

**Translators available*

Some organisations listed are very busy so it may take a while to get a response to a query.



#WeAreBristol

**BRISTOL
ONE CITY**

Image 2 Cost of living signposting poster.

Media

Ws had a significant amount of media interest both before and after their launch. Bristol's Mayor, Marvin Rees, carried out interviews with local television and radio stations, as well as with nationals, including Channel 5 News, BBC Radio 4, 5 Live, and French news broadcaster TF1.

Mayor's blog

The aim of the blog during the cost of living crisis was to reflect the impact on citizens, communities, and organisations across all sectors, including businesses. It also shared stories of positive neighbourly and community action.

Between August 2022 and April 2023, 19 cost of living-related posts were published on the Mayor's Blog. These included posts authored by Marvin, as well as a range of guest blogs from city partners, advice agencies and Ws.

[A blog announcing the launch](#) of Ws was the most viewed blog on Marvin's website in 2022, receiving around 1,900 views. It was also the most viewed blog of all the cost of living content published on the site.

Information about Ws

Information about Ws was available on the council's cost of living webpage. An interactive online map of the spaces was also provided, as well as a list organised by ward.

On average, 63 people per day visited the map of Ws from October 2022 to April 2023, and there were 10,652 views of the page during this time.

We Are Bristol Helpline

The free We Are Bristol Helpline was available to people for specific requests linked to the cost of living. From November 2022 to March 2023, 359 phone calls were received on the phoneline. Colleagues from Citizen Services also looked at the number of people calling from other phonelines (e.g., council tax, benefits, rents etc) where the cost of living was a factor in the call being made. Over the trial of 16 days, 8% of Helpline calls were recorded as being linked to the cost of living crisis.

Funding

Funding was made available to community and voluntary organisations including the advice and wellbeing sectors. This funding enabled groups to keep the lights and heating on at a time of rising costs, to strengthen capacity, and to expand their offers.

In total, £2.4 million of funding was distributed as part of the One City winter response.

Distributed through	Purpose	Amount
Quartet Community Foundation	Social Actions Small Grants to community organisations for Welcoming Spaces and activities	£445,000
	Co-ordination and information sharing through community hubs	£452,000
	To develop and deliver Advice offer to Welcoming Spaces	£260,000
	To provide emotional wellbeing support to citizens and communities through WSS	£200,000
Quartet Community Foundation aligned funding	To support community and voluntary sector with cost of living pressures	£400,000
Household Support Fund – Feeding Bristol	Food support to community and voluntary groups	£525,000
Private donor	Welcoming Spaces	£131,250
Total		£2,413,250

Bristol Welcoming Spaces funding overview

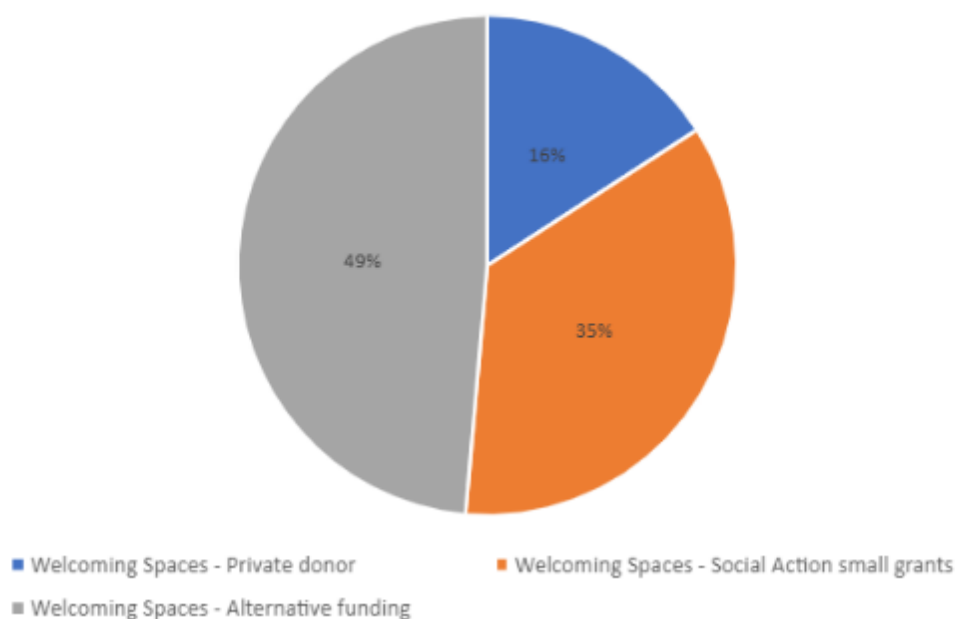


Figure 2 Bristol Welcoming Spaces funding overview.

A private donor came forward to give a first boost to the WSs initiative by funding 17 of them.

Quartet Community Foundation advertised [Cost of Living Social Action Small Grants](#) with awards of up to £5,000 to support community activities and for the set-up of WSs. In total, 101 projects were funded, for a total of £445,000.⁵

From Quartet's end-of-grant report⁶, 56% of the grantees said their project outcome had improved mental health and wellbeing, 30% improved physical health and wellbeing and 23% reduced social isolation.

Seven of the 43 end-of-grant reports were first-time applicants. For many projects, this grant raised community awareness of their organisation, increasing their reach. Organisations used this grant to develop collaborations, partnerships, and signposting, and they valued opportunities to connect with other services.

Quartet also supplied funding to 19 community hubs to help consolidate their role in coordinating the cost of living response in their local area. They also funded the advice and wellbeing sectors⁷, who supplied added resources to WSs.

These are exceptionally challenging times financially. The One City, Many Communities approach is about building upon existing assets. The council will continue partnership working through the Bristol Funders Network to seek opportunities to maximise and align funding.

⁵ Full list of funded organisations [Microsoft Word - Social Action Small grants list v2.docx \(quartetcf.org.uk\)](#)

⁶ The End of Grants report from Quartet evaluated 43 applicants (other are due by late summer/autumn)

⁷ See further up in the report 'Mental Health' and 'Mental Wellbeing' sections

Welcoming Spaces

105 WSs opened their doors to residents over the winter. The concept of WSs⁸ was developed from discussions between the Mayor and community organisations across Bristol, who wanted to find ways to support people struggling with rising energy prices.

The conversation was initially about creating communal warm spaces for people to access for free, out of concern for people unable to afford to heat their home during the coldest months. However, there was also concern about people feeling judged or stigmatised for needing to access such a space, which resulted in the emphasis on WSs. All partners were committed to putting social justice, equity, and inclusion at the heart of the response.

The aim was not to create new or dedicated places for people struggling with the cost of living but to build on existing assets by highlighting what already existed. We wanted to let people know they would be welcomed and have the choice of something fun and engaging to do, as well as getting help and advice if needed.

Two rounds of social action grants, made available through Quartet Community Foundation, supported the WSs initiative, funding heating, lighting, hot drinks, and money for activities.

WSs were invited to register on the Bristol City Council [cost of living website](#). To be part of the network they needed to confirm they met the criteria⁹.

Once registered, they were added to a public map which gave opening times and details of what was available. This was an important innovation for Bristol making information accessible to both citizens and colleagues wanting to support others.

⁸ More information about Welcoming Spaces and how to join the network: [Support the Welcoming Spaces network \(bristol.gov.uk\)](#)

⁹ [Criteria for Welcoming Spaces \(bristol.gov.uk\)](#)

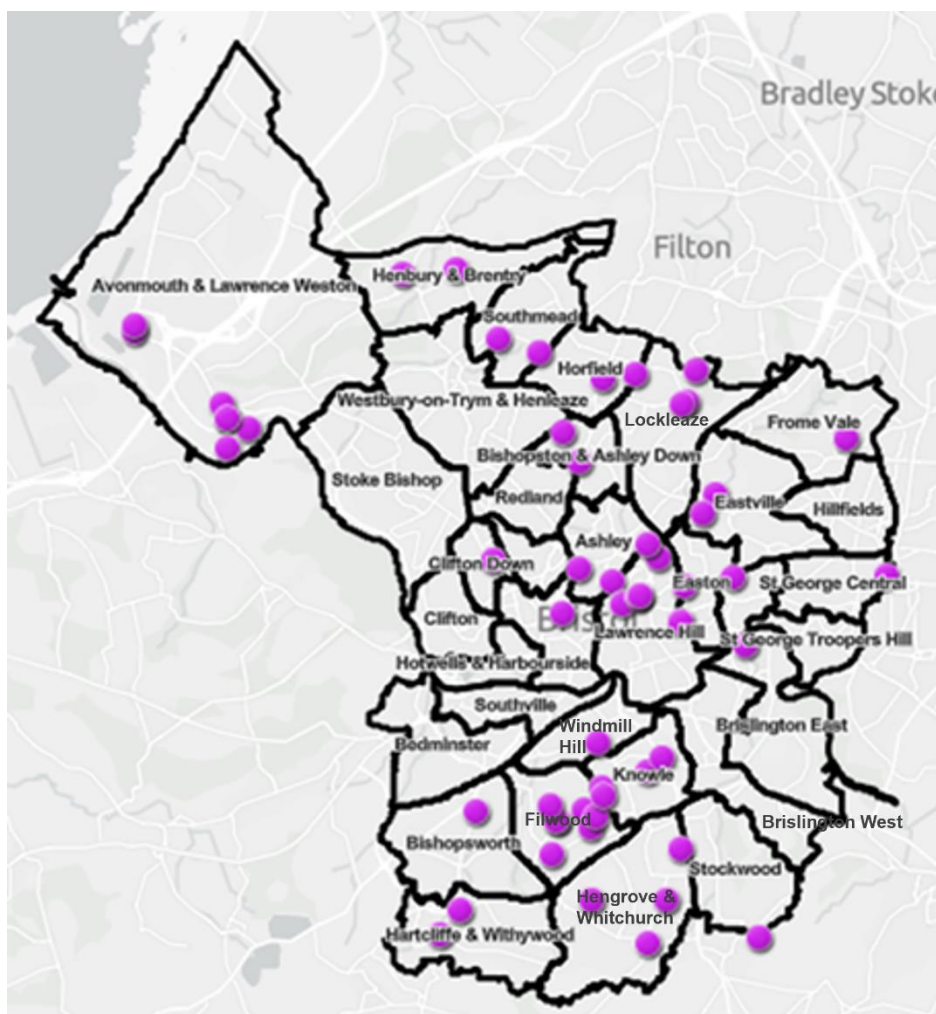


Image 3 Map of WSs in Bristol.

To find out more about WSs you can read the three stories from Hillfields Library Centre, Bristol Somali Resource Centre, and Jalalabad Islamic Centre in Appendix A of this report. The quotes below come from these stories. A number of stories were also posted on the [Mayor's blog](#) and we created a [film featuring just some of the spaces](#).

Key findings

This section reviews responses to a survey that was circulated to all WSs at the end of March 2023. Of the 105 total Spaces, eighty completed and returned the survey. The survey would have been filled in by staff and volunteers involved in running the WSs.

Diverse types of spaces

The network of WSs is made of five diverse types of spaces - community organisations, care homes, children centres, places of faith, leisure centres.

Of the spaces that responded to the survey, 62% of WSs considered themselves to be 'new' (they specifically opened as a response to the rising cost of living).



Photo 1 Mayor Marvin Rees is pictured with volunteers who run the Welcoming Space in Henbury and Brentry Community Centre.

For example, there were six leisure centres in Bristol that opened their doors as WSs, supplying access to hot showers and a hot drink.

Of the total 105 WSs in Bristol, 47% of them were in priority areas¹⁰. Overall, 86% of Bristol residents were within a ten-minute walk of a WS.

Resources

A wide ranging offer was available in WSs. Hot drinks (90%), Wi-Fi (83%) and a space to relax and for social connection (88%) were the most common offers in WSs. Other resources were available to WSs to support them in their work: 80% of them used the online map of WSs and more than 60% were in contact with their community hubs and used cost of living leaflets provided.

¹⁰ The October 2022 cost of living risk index identified which neighbourhoods in Bristol were most at risk from the impact of the rising cost of living



Figure 3 Offer from Welcoming Spaces.



Photo 2 Wellspring Settlement, EatWell café.



Photo 3 Sports session activity offered by Grassroots Sports Bristol, BS14 Youth Club

Impact on communities

An estimated 4,911 people per week visited WSs. Visits varied from two to 500 residents per week and space. This significant difference in people attending reflects the different spaces. Some were 'pop up' spaces opening over the winter in response to the cost of living – they tended to have fewer numbers. The larger numbers were at community centres which are open much of the day, are known to communities and already have people attending events and activities.

In order not to be intrusive or stigmatise people, we did not monitor the reason for people attending. Anyone and everyone were welcome and opening hours, staff and volunteer capacity all contributed to the numbers of attendees.

All the WSs responding to the survey said that the network of spaces supported Bristol residents over the winter 2022/2023

The biggest impact respondents felt their space had:

- people socialising and building connection 93%)
- people receiving information about cost of living support (66%)
- people receiving advice (66%)
- emergency support (for example, food provision) (68%)



Photo 2 A homework club run by Easton Family Centre and Refugee Women of Bristol.

Opening to more people for longer hours was fantastic but it also brought its challenges. WSs found some behaviour difficult to deal with and a number of people visiting the Spaces had significant problems which WSs were not experienced or resourced to provide support with.

Appendix A includes three Welcoming Space stories from interviews conducted with Friends of Hillfields Library, the Somali Resource Centre, and Jalalabad Islamic Centre.

Value of One City response

Most of the WSs – 90% - responded, ‘yes’ when asked:

- Are there any benefits in having a One City response?
- Did you feel regularly informed about opportunities and updates?
- Did you feel part of a One City response?

When asked to elaborate, most respondents shared that being part of the One City response was an opportunity to build connections with other organisations (e.g. community hubs/organisations, city partners) across the city.

“We have made many new contacts and been introduced to other groups that we were not previously known to us.” Comment from anonymous Welcoming Space, responding to council survey.

“We are in touch with various equalities groups to ensure that deaf and hard of hearing, women and underrepresented groups are made to feel welcome.” Community hub, quoted anonymously in Quartet interim report. Used with permission from Quartet.

For example, some WSs opened their door to external organisation such as the Centre for Deaf and Hard of Hearing People who hosted some awareness session within WSs and also organised some [pop-up events](#) for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community across the city.

“Being part of Welcoming Spaces has helped to connect far easier with partners across the city.” Comment from anonymous Welcoming Space, responding to council survey.



Image 4 Centre for Deaf and Hard of Hearing People, Facebook post

CfD Centre for Deaf and Hard of Hearing People

Welcome Spaces

Pop-up sessions for Deaf and hard of hearing people – everybody welcome
Join us at these locations and times for information and support
Meet our CfD staff and learn more about what we do

<p>Avonmouth</p> <p>Avonmouth Community Centre 257 Avonmouth Road Bristol BS11 9EN</p> <p>Monday 20th March: 10:00 – 2:00pm</p>	<p>Bishopsworth</p> <p>Brunelcare Waverley Gardens Bishopsworth Bristol BS13 8EL</p> <p>Wednesday 22nd March: 10:00 – 2:00pm</p>
<p>Fishponds</p> <p>Bristol Charities Vassall Centre, Gill Avenue Fishponds Bristol BS16 2QQ</p> <p>Tuesday 28th March: 10:00 – 12:00pm</p>	<p>Lockleaze</p> <p>Lockleaze Neighbourhood Trust The Hub - 1 Fedden Buildings Gainsborough Square Bristol BS7 9FB</p> <p>Wednesday 29th March: 10:30 – 1:30pm</p>

Image 5 Centre for Deaf and Hard of Hearing People, pop-up events schedule

Future development

When asked if their WS would be kept open beyond winter (i.e. after April 2023), 62% of respondents said they would. Some spaces mentioned that they will keep their activity as usual and said they would have to reduce their level of offer. All WSs mentioned that the two factors that could prevent them from keeping their activities running are a lack of funding opportunities and costs (staff, bills).

Learning

It takes time to build trust and become established as a WS. Spaces already set up and trusted by their communities saw more people through the WSs initiative.

WSs which opened in response to cost of living found it harder to attract people and need time to build their connections and for people to know they are there.

The biggest impact was on wellbeing and health by providing a valued space for connection with others either through organised activity or somewhere to sit quietly and comfortably with others around.

The connection between the cost of living and WSs (and warm spaces nationally) meant that, for some people, there was a stigma and a sense that they were for people who were struggling to stay warm. Our intention was for people to know there were places all over the city where they would be welcomed whatever their circumstances.

WSs have been an enormous success. They have come from their communities, for their communities and in some instances have led to new community spaces in priority areas which is welcome.

The publicity WSs (and nationally warm spaces) received raised the profile of many community projects who have no budget for publicity and marketing.

Many of the pop up spaces, run by volunteers are taking a break over the summer but may well open-up again in the winter. There is often less going on over the winter and people can feel more isolated over the winter months. There was concern for people who were not able to leave their homes and what more, if anything, could be done.

The information about WSs on the map is a summary of key points. To find out more about the things going on they would need to phone the venue direct, access the internet or phone the We Are Bristol helpline.

Welcome spaces were physical spaces that people had to travel to. Through the winter there was concern about the people who could not travel and who were struggling in their own homes. How could we connect and give a warm welcome to people in their homes or who need support to get out. The learning is based on what WSs say and their perception of why citizens were there.

We agreed we did not want to monitor why people were attending, what difference they made or their experience because it was important nothing got in the way of freely accessing the spaces. We did not want anyone to feel scrutinised. The experience of citizens is therefore inferred by anecdotal evidence and the numbers attending.

When WSs first opened, there was a high demand from city organisations to have a relationship with them and to co-locate workers. This had the potential to make available support and easy access services which could be valuable. However, the point of a WS was to be a place for relaxation, for social connection or to be a home from home. This was managed

by making a menu of offers which the WS could then draw on if it was proper. This worked to some extent but needed WSs to have the ability to engage with the menu of offers and contact the relevant people which proved to be a barrier for many.

Community hubs

Throughout the city, 19 community hubs co-ordinated the cost of living response for their respective communities. Fifteen were place-based (based in geographical area of Bristol) and four were citywide equalities communities.

Their primary role was to co-ordinate activity in their local community, get information to local people and support people to act in their community. They also supported WSs in developing themselves and found other community spaces wanting to be part of the network of WSs. From a co-ordination role, the community hubs were the key point of contact for Bristol City Council to have an overview of what was happening in the areas.

In the north of Bristol, Lockleaze Neighbourhood Trust developed a map and leaflets of all the WSs in their area which was printed and available on their social media and [website](#). Lockleaze Neighbourhood Trust also shared stories on their website of different WSs in their area and how they made a difference for the community. You can read more [in this story from DET Entertainment](#).

In the south, Bricks developed a [community newsletter](#): *“Each issue will centre around free/affordable activities, groups, and support available during the colder seasons. We want to showcase community action, feature projects, organisations, creativity, and fun going on across Brislington.”* From Quartet Interim report. Used with permission from Quartet.

The newsletter is available online and was also distributed door to door in Brislington.



Photo 7 Briz Magazine 2023. Photo copyright Bricks 2023. Used with permission.

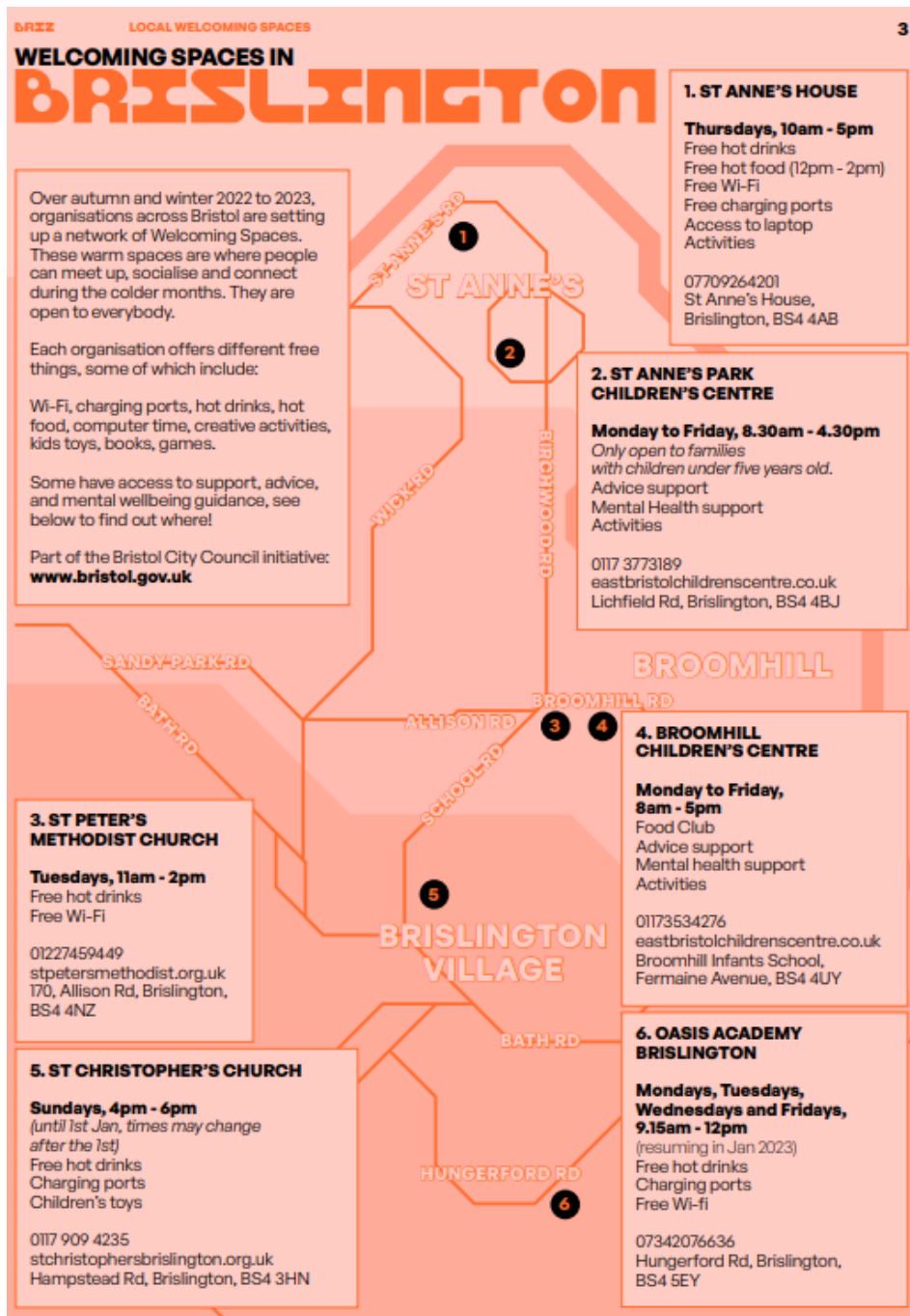


Image 6 Bricks newsletter – Welcoming Spaces in Brislington. Image copyright Bricks 2023. Used with permission.

Redcatch Community Garden created a dedicated [Community Hub page](#) on its website where it uploaded information related to WSs in its area and across the city. There was also a dedicated space to access advice and support for residents. A notice board in front of its own WSs is also used to share information and signpost.

Other equality community hubs had a specific role in increasing the accessibility of WSs to wider groups. For example, [Bristol Women's Voice](#) offered guidance to make the WSs

accessible to more women. They also created a broadcast-only WhatsApp group to share information and opportunities available to women.

WECIL developed an accessibility guide to WSs and provided an accessibility self-audit guide which was then uploaded onto the [Bristol City Council website](#).

Learning

Please note, all the quotes contained in this learning section are from a variety of anonymised community hubs, collected for an internal interim monitoring report produced by Quartet Community Foundation. They have been used here with permission from Quartet.

In the Welcoming Spaces final survey, 50% of the WSs working with community hubs said they found the accessibility self-audit guide 'very/extremely helpful.'

It takes time for activities to be developed and taken up, and to develop a community hub. Creating these as a crisis response was challenging.

"The challenge that we faced was meeting the demand for our services. We have seen an influx of people requiring support with an unprecedented range of situations. With ever-increasing pressure on our small staff team, we increased our staff and recruited more volunteers to help us support people affected by the cost of living crisis."

Now that the infrastructure exists, it can be developed to mitigate the pressure put on community organisations and services when working in a crisis response context. The community hub function should continue to be built upon to sustain and grow their capability to deliver for and with their communities.

"The biggest challenge for us has been the short-term nature of the response and funding. We have built trusting relationships with new residents and have been able to help people access information, build skills and confidence and connect within their communities. However long-term change takes longer term investment. As we move into April, we are seeing the next round of increases and reductions in support."

These trusting relationships must be sustained for the next step of the response to be effective.

Some community hubs had a double function as a WS. In addition, they juggled with increasing pressure on their staff who were supplying support to their service users and supplying extra services within their own space. Having access to more funding to support their community hub function was crucial to succeed in their role.

"Having another navigator in the team has not only added lots of additional resource and expertise but also freed up other staff who are experiencing significantly increased demand with cost of living related matters such as benefits, applications to small grants, help with financial assessments and the distribution of food vouchers."

Community hubs built new relationships and partnerships with other community organisations in their local areas. A hub shared that one of their regular users visited other WSs to get to know what other resources and spaces is available in the community.

“It [the funding] has given us time to both develop and build new partnerships across the area. We have had more time to connect to other local groups and organisations, exchanging information, supporting one another and learning more about our communities.”

Through these new partnerships, community hubs helped shape the One City approach and its ways of working. These partnerships will be part of the development of the One City, Many Communities approach going forward.

“We are well positioned to leverage the hub and reach more audiences using the One City approach.”

The community hubs supported a focus on equality communities. This focus has been an asset to WSs, making it possible for them to welcome people from different communities and offer them inclusive, trusted spaces.

“As we build relationships with other community groups and centres, we are deepening the referrals between organisations and supporting specific communities to access support through relationships of trust.”

Community hubs must continue identifying communities and groups that require access to their spaces and thinking about how to make their approach inclusive.

The survey responses highlighted that the distinct roles of community hubs and WSs need to be clarified to avoid confusion.

In spring 2023, Bristol City Council hosted two workshops which were organised with community hubs from the south and north of Bristol. Community hubs shared suggestions on how their work can be developed and strengthened in the future by reinforcing social value. Outcomes from the workshop included:

- agreement on the need to transition away from a crisis response, and towards embedding the community hubs into a sustainable and resilient One City, Many Communities approach.
- exploration of how community hubs can influence the wider system, highlighting the impact of their role in their local areas.
- creation of a long-term plan to strengthen the capacity of the hubs.
- creation of opportunities for a local campaign, and to promote this nationally where appropriate.
- discussion of how to work and influence wider city health inequity.

As the One City, Many Communities approach moves forward, opportunities will be sought to embed these suggestions.

Access to advice and support

Having been key to developing the cost of living crisis response approach last summer, advice agencies adapted quickly to support it despite the pressures the sector is facing around demand and capacity. Advice caseworker provision was increased, and capacity was built in communities through volunteering, and through training people who worked and volunteered in WSs.

A comprehensive [map of all activities](#) created by all agencies providing social welfare advice in Bristol was produced. Citizens Advice Bristol (CAB), the Centre for Sustainable Energy, and Bristol Law Centre played an active role in the co-ordination group.

Advice agencies have had a significant impact on the cost of living crisis response. Training on financial capability, debt, welfare benefits and housing issues has been delivered CAB and Housing Matters to 200 people in 18 WSs and community, health and housing organisations. CAB advice assistant volunteers were based in 13 WSs and on WebChat; 15 volunteers have helped over 170 clients with almost 200 enquiries between mid-December and April.

“CAB now send representatives every week to our Tuesday Welcome Spaces. The representatives join in with the meal and have useful conversations. Our attendees have been incredibly grateful to the CAB volunteers for showing them where they can find savings and benefits.” Community hub, quoted anonymously in Quartet interim report. Used with permission from Quartet.

The extra caseworker capacity created in Housing Matters, North Bristol Advice Centre, South Bristol Advice Services, Age UK and WECIL supported over 400 residents between October 2023 and April 2024. Those residents collectively gained over £500,000 as a result. The caseworkers helped residents in managing £290,000 of debt.¹¹

“The advice services we are accessing from the cost of living response has been an important addition to what we can offer residents and we have tried to ensure that there is a ward-wide ownership of these opportunities.” Community hub, quoted anonymously in Quartet interim report. Used with permission from Quartet.

Learning

For some community organisations, it was their first time working with the advice sector. This is seen as extremely valuable, and this collaboration should be continued and nurtured. Some survey responses showed that it was challenging to link into WSs and promote the support; in these cases, a strengthened community hub co-ordination role is needed. Whilst the short-term extra resource given to the cost of living crisis response was welcome, long-term sustainable funding is needed to continue and expand this provision.

Opportunities were found to maximise the health agenda, and to improve access for the most vulnerable and those that are not accessing WSs.

¹¹ Data provided by advice services.

Advice and support services indicated that an ongoing community training programme would be invaluable to their operations. Where proper, response volunteers need to be supported into secure employment or adequately helped with caring commitments.

Mental health and emotional wellbeing

Mental health and emotion wellbeing support was a key strand of the response because of the strong links between financial issues, emotional distress, and poor mental health. Working on the commitment of the response to asset-based community development, opportunities were sought to build community capacity for peer support by and for local people who were worried about the impact of the rising cost of living.

In the survey of Ws increased social connection was felt to be the most important impact of the response. In a poll of groups receiving social action small grants, improved mental wellbeing was flagged as a primary or secondary outcome by over half of respondents.

Through collaboration with the VCSE Mental Health Alliance, three organisations came forward to support the mental health and emotional wellbeing approach. Training on mental health and wellbeing awareness was delivered to 15 Ws, co-ordinated by Wellspring Settlement. Community mental health link workers, employed by the Richmond Fellowship, supported 21 residents between January and April 2024, although most referrals were not from Ws. Volunteers from community-based mental health charity, Changes Bristol were running peer support wellbeing groups in four Ws.

"The group has been hugely beneficial to my self-esteem, confidence, and happiness. I'm very thankful and grateful for the opportunity given to me." - Changes Bristol group attendee.

Changes Bristol defines peer support as:

"Peer support encompasses a wide range of activities but at its heart it involves individuals with shared experiences coming together to support each other e.g. mental health issues or emotional distress. When this occurs in an inclusive, and confidential space it enables members to feel safe enough to share their experiences with others present. Sharing, being vulnerable, and receiving reflections and validations from peers can help individuals feel accepted, express their feelings, feel understood and less isolated in their experiences. Peer support has many benefits including helping to build community, reducing stigma, enabling individuals to build resilience and to feel empowered to manage their own wellbeing and to gain hope. Peer has become increasingly important as part of a holistic approach to meet the support and recovery needs of communities and individuals due to the ongoing uncertainty around the funding for services and long waiting lists for support."

Learning

It took several months to recruit staff to support the mental health and emotional wellbeing approach. A longer lead in time was needed. Volunteer recruitment continues to be a challenge in this space, as it is for most VCSE sector organisations.

Despite the expected need for mental wellbeing support in our communities, there hasn't been great demand for the wellbeing offer from Ws. There are several reasons, including co-

ordination and promotion challenges, the partnership needing time to bed in, and the possibility that residents already felt adequately supported by WSs. As with the advice and support approach, opportunities presented through the health sector need to be maximised.

Volunteering



Image 1 Can Do Bristol website – Cost of Living campaign.

In August 2022, Bristol City Council developed a 'Cost of Living' campaign page on [the Can Do Bristol volunteering website](#).

The website campaign offered an accessible, dedicated space for community organisations to advertise volunteering opportunities related to the cost of living crisis response. It also allowed citizens who were active on the site to find out how they could support fellow Bristolians at this time.

During the eight-month-long campaign, 246 people pledged to support 34 cost of living volunteer opportunities through the website. 27 different organisations used the Can Do platform to post different volunteering opportunities. Nine of these 27 organisations were based in a cost of living priority area, with others working citywide, for example dropping off food parcels to numerous locations.

Programmes recruiting for volunteers on Can Do included [BOOST](#) looking for financial advice volunteers, FareShare SouthWest looking for van drivers and warehouse assistants, Bristol Citadel and St. Werburghs WS; and resource sharing programmes such as [Bristol Swap Shop](#) and Library of Things.



Image 2 Can Do Bristol, volunteering opportunities available on Can Do Bristol website.

One organisation, Bristol MAZI project, received 17 pledges from Can Do members. MAZI volunteers signed up to pack and/or deliver weekly meal boxes to give disadvantaged young people access to nourishing meals.

Some WSs and community hubs developed their own volunteering processes, either through online platforms or directly within communities.

WSs also highlighted that the recruitment and the management of volunteers can be an additional charge of work which was sometimes not possible to cover due to the lack of resource:

“Another challenge is that it takes a lot of time to engage, manage and support volunteers. As we want to encourage community decision making [...] it has made us think that we need to fund someone who can dedicate more time to coordinating volunteers to enable us to do this.” Community hub, quoted anonymously in Quartet interim report. Used with permission from Quartet.

Another highlight of the response was the partnership with Changes Bristol and CAB to support their services within WSs. In total, [four wellbeing](#) and [nine advice](#) volunteer-run sessions were established (see the advice and wellbeing section, above).

Cost of living community volunteering projects stimulated the development and sharing of common resources, training opportunities and communication plans between the council and partners.¹²

“We have accessed some excellent training for volunteers such as housing from CHAS, financial management from Citizens Advice and Good Conversations from Linking Lives.” Community hub, quoted anonymously in Quartet interim report. Used with permission from Quartet.

For example, Voscur ran four online peer support sessions between December 2023 and March 2024, covering topics such as equality, diversity and inclusion, setting boundaries and supporting staff and volunteers. 50 individuals from 34 different Welcoming Spaces took part, with 12 organisations going on to receive further one-to-one support from advisers, and one organisation requesting bespoke training.

Learning

Volunteers were necessary to enable some WSs to function. Without this resource, many community organisations would not have been able to supply the support offered during the winter. In the final survey of WSs we asked the spaces if they were run by paid staff and/or by volunteers. Replies showed that community organisations were equally run by paid staff and by volunteers. Places of faith were 40% run by volunteers on average.

“We are all volunteers and the initial setting up of the scheme was very time consuming on the [four] of us in the core group. The scheme is now running smoothly but is still dependant

¹² Bristol City Council, Department for Work and Pensions, Bristol universities, VCSE partners

on the core group to organise the volunteers and be on hand for all the sessions.” Comment from anonymous Welcoming Space, responding to council survey.

The role of volunteering needs to be developed and strengthened for the next phase of the approach, as it is clearly a key ingredient in sustaining the work of WSs.

Working together as One City

One City participants agreed to follow a set of principles¹³ which underpinned the approach.

- working together
- social justice and equity
- asset-based community development
- co-ordinate access to immediate/crisis support whilst also focusing on resilience
- learn and adapt as we go

The One City cost of living crisis response sought to address four priorities.

- immediate emergency and welfare support
- maximising household income and reducing living costs
- keeping well
- community assets and community wealth building

The [One City cost of living approach](#) was delivered by a diverse network of over 50 organisations and hundreds of people freely giving their time. The group was committed to organising itself in ways which were accessible and relevant to various parts of the group's ecosystem, so that together it could better understand the impact of the cost of living crisis on citizens across diverse communities, find creative solutions and act together.

The following different meeting spaces were available for partners to work together.

The Community Exchange

The Community Exchange is a space for community, voluntary and faith sectors working together with Bristol City Council. It was set up as part of the COVID-19 response and continues to play a pivotal role in knowledge-sharing and co-ordination. All Ws and community hubs in Bristol were invited to join the fortnightly Community Exchange meeting. Partners from the advice and wellbeing sectors were also invited to join these sessions, to update attendees on their work and to help build partnerships with community organisations.

Additionally, the Community Exchange was opened to other community organisations across the city, enabling them to remain up to date on the cost of living response. The space was also an opportunity to invite external partners who do not have a link with the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) sector to share any offers and create new partnerships.

Learning:

In the final survey of Ws, 48% of respondents said they were attending the Community Exchange meetings and 40% of the 80 responses showed that they found it very/extremely

¹³ For more information about 'Working together as One City' - please read our One City cost of living approach [Bristol-Cost-of-Living-Crisis-Plan-2022-2023-v2-3.pdf \(bristolonecity.com\)](#)

helpful to attend the meetings. Some spaces said that they could not attend the meetings due to the lack of staff, and/or the meeting being hosted during their space's opening hours.

The Community Exchange meetings will continue to run. The timing of the meetings will be reviewed to find a way to open it up to more people, particularly those who run community projects in their own time.

One City co-ordination group

This group brought together key stakeholders from across the city including universities, hospital trusts, the Department of Work and Pensions, community and voluntary sector, advice agencies, financial support, employment and skills and equalities groups (see Appendix B).

Its core purpose was to understand the impact of the cost of living crisis on citizens and to make sure resources were being used effectively to supply support. For example, one outcome from this group was the collaboration between the University of Bristol and Wellspring Settlement to provide [academic support](#) to primary school students. The University of Bristol funded IntoUniversity which recruited students to provide help with homework. In total, 94 primary school students received help from these sessions. The highest number of students attending in a single evening was 24. An article on the [Mayor's blog](#) was dedicated to this topic.

The One City co-ordination group meeting was supported by Bristol City Council and chaired jointly by Bristol City Council, Citizens Advice Bristol and Bristol Law Centre.

Through the co-ordination group meetings, a strong network was supported throughout the winter, committed to meeting weekly. An external speaker was invited to join the group to share information and connect their work and resources to the One City response. For example, Avon Fire & Rescue Service presented their 'Save Safely' winter safety campaign.

New connections were made through the group leading to further collaborations. For example, Citizens Advice trained Second Step and North Bristol NHS Staff ('Starting a conversation about financial difficulties, understanding debt and overview of welfare benefits').

"I found it incredibly useful to understand the network of fantastic groups and individuals working collectively on this agenda across the city. The various circulations were helpful for me to share with frontline police professionals so they could signpost to services and warm spaces." – Elizabeth Hughes, Chief Superintendent of Avon and Somerset Police

Partners agreed that the One City approach is effective and encourages everyone to do what they are best placed to do and work collaboratively across a place rather than in professional and service silos. The One City co-ordination group will continue in some form, and partners will work together to develop an approach that aligns with One City plan.

Mayor's meetings with community workers

This monthly meeting was established by the Mayor as a space to give a heads up to people working in communities about key strategic developments and to hear their feedback and insights as the people close to citizens and who know communities. This meeting developed the idea of WSs and the winter response.

The Mayor also convened three evening meetings for people running WSs, to hear about their work and to lend support. This allowed some partners to share their work directly with the Mayor when they wouldn't usually have the opportunity during working hours.

Learning

The VCSE sector is looking for ways to reach out to people in power who have a stronger influence on national policy. At an event hosted in April 2023 (see One City, Many Communities) community organisations indicated that they are looking for ways to raise awareness in central government of their work and influence. The Mayor's meetings with community workers were an opportunity for workers to access a dedicated space with the Mayor and to share key messages.

Having the Mayor's strong leadership throughout the whole winter response was seen as an asset in developing the approach and gathering partners across the city. One City will continue to find key areas of policy for discussion and development, to maximise the influence of the Mayoral office, and seek to fully embed the role of local councillors in developing the One City, Many Communities approach.

One Council Group

The One Council Group is a monthly meeting of all city council teams and services with insight into, and who have been contributing to the cost of living response. This space has facilitated valuable information sharing and insight across services and teams which do not otherwise routinely come together.

City Partners

This is a weekly meeting hosted by the Mayor with key strategic partners. It galvanised support for the crisis response and secured funding for WSs through a private donor.

Learning

The Mayor played a key role in connecting strategic partners across the city. By advocating and promoting the One City approach to different partners, it enabled the city to be seen and heard by influential actors. The Mayor and the city will continue to advocate for Bristol's approach in key meetings.

Working together as a city supplied opportunities for partners from different sectors to come together and build new partnerships. The cost of living crisis brought together people from diverse areas of work with a common goal to mitigate the impact of the inflation on residents of Bristol. These connections will be built upon, understanding how these groups are linked and ensuring they are working effectively and in a co-ordinated manner.

One City, Many Communities

In April 2023, the Mayor invited all involved in the One City response to a 'thank you' event at City Hall. More than 120 people attended the event, representing a diverse range of sectors. All Ws, community hubs and city partners involved in the approach were included. This was an opportunity to hear from different partners and Ws, to reflect on their work and discuss the legacy of the winter response.



Photo 8 Cost of living event at City Hall, 19th April 2023.

Bristol was able to respond quickly and systematically to the COVID-19 emergency and the cost of living crisis because of existing infrastructure, including:

- the convening power and influence of the Mayoral office
- the One City partnership
- established working relationships with the community and voluntary sector, and strategic city partners, through the Communities team
- the reputation and trust communities have in community and voluntary sector organisations which has been carefully nurtured over time

However, the cost of living crisis response directly followed the COVID-19 crisis response, creating a difficult context in which to mobilise. The cost of living crisis response could not solve the problems people were facing. The aim was to do what was possible to make life easier for as many people as possible.

As spring 2023 arrived and the weather grew warmer, key messages from response partners included that the tough times have not gone away. For many people life is harder. There's a need to move away from crisis and short-term response, to embed what works. Finally, we must focus on finding sustainable solutions to poverty and inequity. The most valuable asset to emerge from the last three years is our way of working together which provides the basis for long term sustainable change.

On 19th April, all 120 people unanimously agreed:

Together we are building something unique and powerful which we want to strengthen and accelerate. We are calling this the One City, Many Communities approach (see figure 4).

The learning from the response will take the infrastructure that has been developed and keep a focus on equity, social justice, and wellbeing to:

- find sustainable ways forward, supporting people most impacted by low income, poverty, and inequity
- continue to build community power and community wealth for the long term



Figure 1 One City, Many Communities approach.

The One City Many Communities approach acknowledges that Bristol's resilience and ability to respond to a crisis comes from the strength of Bristol's communities.

Figure 4 (above) analyses the cost of living response – the principles, priorities, and seven key ingredients. Figure 5 (below) shows the strength of our working relationships.

One City, Many Communities



Figure 2 One City, Many Communities working relationships.

Communities are complex, delicate ecosystems that will thrive in the right conditions. Inequity and poverty harms citizens and fractures communities. The One City, Many Communities approach is about how to work together as a city to create the conditions that will nurture these ecosystems. Collective weight will be put behind addressing the causes of inequity and poverty by finding ways to encourage citizen action, community leadership and continue to invest in community infrastructure.

Challenges ahead - inequity and poverty forecast

Inequality and poverty are expected to increase across Bristol as communities continue to be affected by the cost of living. Energy, housing, and food prices are forecast to continue to rise, increasing debt and interest rates, unemployment and potentially causing a decline in real-term earnings. All these factors will contribute to reducing living standards.

Financial resilience is projected to continue to decline, with reduced disposable income and an estimated one in four households being under severe financial strain.¹⁴ Food insecurity, child poverty and fuel poverty are forecast to continue to increase and affect residents across the city, with financial pressures continuing to affect both physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing.

The groups previously identified in Bristol's One City approach to support citizens and communities¹⁵ that are most exposed to these factors will continue to be disproportionately affected.

People on the lowest incomes. This group will continue to feel the greatest impacts of rising costs and inflation, with a decrease in disposable income. Many have reported increased arrears, debt stress and anxiety, and are at higher risk of falling behind with debt payments.¹⁶

Parents and young families. Absolute child poverty is expected to continue to rise, which could leave an additional 500 children in absolute poverty by 2026/27.¹⁷

Middle-income households. This group may see an increase in financial difficulty and could require access to support which they may not have needed before. They are likely to experience the greatest change in living standards; however, groups with the lowest incomes will still experience greater impacts.¹⁸

Social and private renters. There's a growing gap between Local Housing Allowance (LHA) and benefits provision in relation to local rental prices, putting additional pressure on households. Renters are also experiencing increased debt anxiety and are at disproportionate risk of falling behind with debt payments.¹⁹

Owner occupiers. This group may be affected by higher interest mortgage rates causing significant financial stress and anxiety about being able to pay bills.²⁰

Households with pre-payment energy meters. From June 2023 the pre-payment meter price premium has been removed. However there is an increase in households with debt on their energy meter and increasing gas self-disconnections.²¹

¹⁴ Hargreaves Lansdown (July 2023) [A savings and resilience barometer for Great Britain](#)

¹⁵ <https://www.bristolonecity.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Bristol-Cost-of-Living-Crisis-Plan-2022-2023-v2-3.pdf>

¹⁶ Hargreaves Lansdown (July 2023) [A savings and resilience barometer for Great Britain](#)

¹⁷ Resolution Foundation (March 2023) [Were-going-on-a-growth-hunt](#)

¹⁸ Financial Times (April 2023) [Britain's middle classes feel the pinch in cost of living crisis](#)

¹⁹ Hargreaves Lansdown (July 2023) [A savings and resilience barometer for Great Britain](#)

²⁰ Ipsos (June 2023) [A third of Britons worry about paying their rent or mortgage now](#)

²¹ Ofgem (2023) [Debt and Arrears Indicators](#)

Disabled people, Black, Asian and minoritised ethnic groups, women, and carers will continue to be disproportionately impacted.

Neighbourhoods experiencing deprivation and areas previously identified by the council as being at greater risk of experiencing disproportionate impacts from the cost of living crisis include Lawrence Hill, Hartcliffe and Withywood, Filwood, Lockleaze, Ashley, Southmead, Easton, Avonmouth and Lawrence Weston, Hillfields and Eastville.

A more detailed forecast of inequity and poverty in Bristol is available on request. Please email bristolcostofliving@bristol.gov.uk to receive a copy.

The One City Many Communities approach will continue to evolve and embed strategic ways of working through Ws, community hubs and advice and emotional wellbeing support.

The Mayor continues to meet with people who work in communities every month. This is an important opportunity to share insights with the Mayor and work together to make a difference for the citizens of Bristol.

Conclusion

The One City cost of living response proves Bristol's capacity to mobilise the city in a fast, community-led response.

City partners, community organisations, places of worship and the public sector worked together to supply the most suitable and impactful response to citizens. This joint effort from different partners was supported through new ways of working, new partnerships, and a network of 105 Ws, which in turn supported nearly 5,000 citizens per week on average to access community and social connection, Wi-Fi, hot drinks, financial and other advice, and mental health and emotional wellbeing support. This is a strong legacy for continuing development.

Food prices and other living expenses are still high. April 2023 saw a reduction in government support with the conclusion of the Energy Bill Support Scheme. The impact of the cost of living crisis has been far greater on people who are already poor and on low incomes, and it will carry on for the foreseeable future.

We will continue to work with partners to build upon the successes, learning and outcomes of the cost of living response as One City, Many Communities and agree how we move forward together.

Appendix A

Welcoming Space stories

Hillfields Library

Sarah – a member of the Friends of Hillfields Library and organiser of the Hillfields Community Garden – has been responsible for running a Welcoming Space via Hillfields Library. Sarah secured funding from Quartet and Feeding Bristol in the anticipation that there wouldn't be much support offered in the local area and worked with the libraries service to extend opening hours for community members to meet in a friendly and warm place.

As well as extending the opening hours, Sarah and a group of volunteers were able to offer well planned daily food packages to anyone who requested it. Sarah also coordinated with organisations such as the Bristol Energy Network and Bristol City Council's Adult Education team to ensure that information and support on reducing energy use, benefits advice and accessing employment and skills opportunities were readily available to the local community.

Above all, Sarah quickly realised that the Welcoming Space became most significant as a place for community building; having described the area as lacking a 'central place' to congregate (like a shopping centre), Sarah highlighted the importance of the space becoming a place for people to talk, share their culture (through events organised for festivals such as Ramadan) and build inter-generational links.

Sarah believes that it was essential to create a space where everyone – regardless of their situation or status – felt welcomed and where all people were treated with 'dignity and respect'. By focussing on developing a home-like 'living room library' and by proactively speaking to everyone who entered the space, Sarah was able to establish a space the community felt attracted and welcomed to.

But the space was not just about people receiving support or a warm welcome; it also became a place where opportunities to volunteer were developed. In some cases, people who visited the library for the first time via the Welcoming Space then went on to formally volunteer for other events and programmes run through the library. In one case, a frequent visitor of the space used her multiple languages to welcome community members who did not speak English as their first language.

Sarah acknowledges that the Welcoming Space was not able to solve all of people's problems but was able to be a place where people could find strength through others and begin to find positive steps forward. Looking ahead, she would like to see more community spaces open up where people can build community and access information, guidance and support at the same time.

Somali Resource Centre

Abdullahi – Founder and Director of Somali Resource Centre – has been responsible for running a Welcoming Space through the organisation. The organisation has existed for many years and has acted as a welcoming space for the community long before the ‘cost of living’ crisis began. The funding has supported the organisation to extend its opening hours, host daily drop-ins and weekly community events.

The daily drop-ins have provided members of the community with an opportunity to come to the centre to meet others over a drink, access free Wi-Fi and access advice on a range of issues. The weekly community events were organised to provide people with a hot meal and a chance to build community during the winter period. Abdullahi reflected on the added importance of the community events during the school holidays where, some weeks, they would have up to 200 children, young people and parents at one time.

The centre has always existed as a trusted source of advice or a place where people can be guided to the right support, but the additional resource provided through the Welcoming Spaces initiative meant this offer could be expanded. Throughout the winter months, staff and volunteers were able to refer community members to the Centre for Sustainable Energy, help translate information about the Energy Support Scheme and intervene when households were informed of unexpectedly high energy bills. In one instance, the centre supported an individual when they were sent an energy bill in error, meaning they were saved from unnecessarily paying hundreds of pounds.

Abdullahi reflected on the importance of the centre being there for people who were ‘desperate’ but also for strengthening a sense of community more broadly. By helping to empower people with information and advice, the Somali Resource Centre has been able to contribute to people’s individual resilience and a sense of wider community strength. Looking ahead, Abdullahi believes that the challenges will continue to intensify before things get better but is committed to ensuring the community have a place to have their needs met and strengthen their connections.

Jalalabad Islamic Centre

Waliur is a Trustee of the Jalalabad Islamic Centre (based in Eastville), a community-based organisation committed to tackling mental health stigma and providing culturally sensitive opportunities for people to receive support for their wellbeing. The centre acts as a spiritual centre for the community and offers open access to qualified mental health practitioners. Given the impacts the increasing cost of living has had on many people and communities across Bristol, Waliur believed that it was natural that Jalalabad should step up their efforts to provide a Welcoming Space for the community.

Like many of the Welcoming Spaces, Jalalabad has focussed its offer on the provision of food and drink, and activities for the community to come together around. Waliur believes the familiarity and safety of the centre has helped to reduce the stigma of coming to a Welcoming Space and has meant people have a recognisable place to seek support. Through

this, Waliur and other community leaders have been able to direct people to appropriate support and ensure they don't get 'lost in the system'.

Waliur reflected on the fact that the 'old ways of doing things' aren't working anymore; in other words, expecting people to go to established health systems to find mental health support (in the same way you might when you are physically unwell) is unreasonable. For Waliur, having a network of community based Welcoming Spaces was a more natural way for people to speak about their challenges and begin to seek solutions. Having Welcoming Spaces acted as a great 'preventative measure', ensuring that people were seen and understood before their mental health challenges escalated.

It became clear to leaders at the centre that a larger proportion of the community were struggling with their bills and the cost of living, and as a result, were facing heightened mental health challenges. It was Waliur's belief that having a recognised Welcoming Space for the community was an important step towards ensuring that people in this position had an avenue to getting support. Even as energy prices come down and the cost of living increases ease, the need to have continued access to mental health advice will be important for the community.

Appendix B

Cost of Living coordination group members

Avon and Somerset Police	Good Faith Partnership
Black Southwest Network	Knowle West Alliance
Bristol City Council	NHS Bristol
Bristol Diocese	Oasis UK
Bristol Disability Equality Forum	Quartet
Bristol Law Centre	Refugee Women of Bristol
Bristol Older People Forum	Richmond Fellowship
Bristol Women's Voice	Second Step
Centre for Sustainable Energy	SLR Consulting
Changes Bristol	University of Bristol
Citizen Advice Bureau Bristol	Voscur
Clean Slate	WECIL
Department for Work and Pensions	Wellspring Settlement
Feeding Bristol	