

# **Council's task force to continue following 'catastrophic' decisions by UK Government**

**by Marie Sharp Local Democracy Reporter**

**A cost of living taskforce set up to deal with a winter crisis may have to continue longer term after some 'catastrophic' decisions by the UK Government, a council leader has warned.**

Midlothian Council established the taskforce at its first meeting after May's local authority election with new council leader Kelly Parry at the helm.

The cross party group has already established a 'Heat and Eat Fund' of £279,000 to help families not eligible for Scottish Welfare supports and pledged just under £1million to help low income households as part of the Live Well Locally project.

With funding from the council's share of a national Covid Recovery Fund, local food banks will be given £100,000 to make sure those most in need can feed their families while £400,000 will go to expanding the council's 'trusted partners' – a network of local organisations offering practical help and

support to those most in need.

And a meeting of the full council has also supported plans to introduce a free laundry service and re-heatable meals for the county's most vulnerable families.

But while Cllr Parry said the task force, believed to be the first established by a local authority in Scotland, had initially been seen as a winter support scheme, it may now have to continue.

She said the effect of the Westminster mini-budget announced by Chancellor Kwasi Kwarteng had made the situation worse.

She said: "The things that have happened in the last few weeks have had an absolutely catastrophic impact. I do not know what the UK government is going to do next.

"I do fear now that we are going to need the taskforce for a much longer period of time."

As well as supporting vulnerable families, Councillor Parry said there was a 'new anxiety' for people who had not had to ask for help before.

She said: "People are getting anxious at the moment, it is getting colder and people do not want to put their heating on.

"People are having to make really difficult choices and there is a new anxiety for those who have a mortgage and have seen their payments go up as well as energy payments.

"We have people coming for help who have never had to ask for help."

The council leader urged anyone needing support to get in touch with the local authority and find out what help is available.

She said: "We recognise our own employees will be in positions

where they may need help and support and are working hard to help.

“We are also encouraging people to get in touch so we can signpost them to where they can get help and support from us.”

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