
Cost of Living, Food Poverty and Fuel Poverty

Public Health and Health Integration Scrutiny Commission

Date of meeting: 27/01/2026

Lead director/officer: Edward Quick

Useful information

- Ward(s) affected: All
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- Report version number: 5

1. Summary

This report aims to update around cost-of-living projects being managed by the Health in All Policies (HIAP) team.

Through this update we intend to bring Public Health and Health Integration Scrutiny Commission up to speed in terms of our current positions and priorities across a series of operational delivery areas.

Please note that the matters reported on here have progressed through Public Health Departmental Management Team, and Public Health Lead Member Briefing and so where data is included it is captured up to the end of August 2025. The figures included are intended to provide an indication of direction of travel. If required, end of year figures can be provided in due course.

The report covers:

Fuel Poverty

Involving the raising of awareness of the health impacts of fuel poverty, and the provision of support for those experiencing fuel poverty in Leicester.

Access to period products

Involving the operational delivery of free period products made available without stigma within Leicester City Council libraries.

Food Poverty & Feeding Leicester

Involving the coordination and development of the Feeding Leicester group, and the operational development and implementation of free school meal auto-enrolment within Leicester.

Cost of Living meetings

Involving changes to the cost-of-living meetings that HIAP facilitate.

2. Recommendation(s) to scrutiny:

Public Health and Health Integration Scrutiny Commission Scrutiny Commission are invited to:

- Recognise and approve the direction of travel for Fuel Poverty work
- Recognise and approve the direction of travel of work relating to access to period products.

- Recognise and approve the direction of travel relating to food poverty and Feeding Leicester
- Recognise and approve the direction of travel around Free School Meals (FSM) auto-enrolment
- Note the direction of travel around the cost-of-living group

3. Detailed report

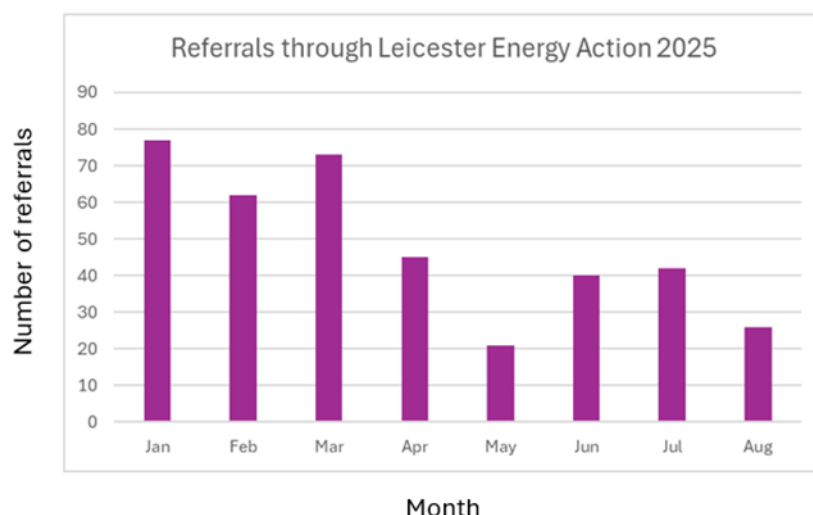
3.1 Fuel Poverty

Fuel Poverty has a devastating impact on physical and mental health. Although the formal Leicester Energy Action programme ended in winter 2024, the support infrastructure that was built remains in place, well-maintained, and well-used. While National Energy Action (NEA) continue their fantastic work nationwide, not least through the Warm Homes, Healthy Futures programme, HIAP keep a close relationship with our NEA counterparts, and continue to work to raise awareness and open access channels to support within Leicester. The NEA team can work with clients around energy debt, to ensure that they are able to manage energy in their home, and to make their home as energy efficient as it can be.

3.1.2 2025 (post Leicester Energy Action) referral data

The referral channels created through the Leicester Energy Action project remain active and well-used by referral partners, in particular front-line LCC teams such as Supporting Tenants and Residents (STAR). We have worked to ensure that there is no referral criteria into support. We also promote self-referral channels including a direct contact telephone number.

Number of referrals per month (January-August 2025)



Since the programme closed in December 2024 we've received 386 referrals – similar numbers to those we received during the programme and following a similar pattern of higher referral numbers during colder months. Although the clients referred to the service

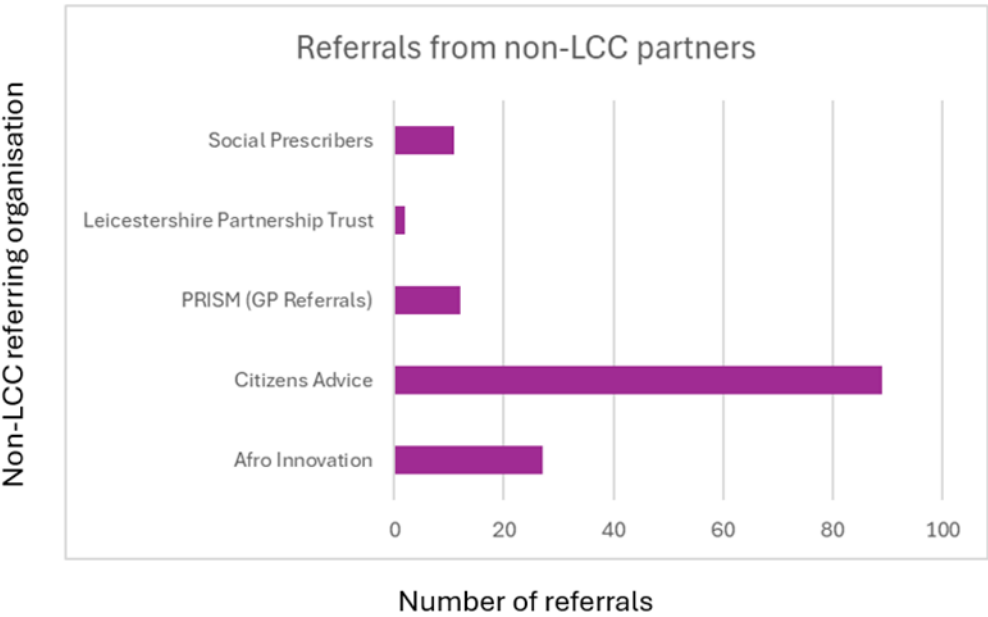
are no longer linked to a dedicated Leicester-based team, the service they receive remains in line with the high standards delivered throughout the Leicester Energy Action project. The NEA team also continue to escalate cases to HIAP where there is a concern that direct Leicester City Council intervention is needed, particularly around housing repair issues.

Number of referrals by referring organisation (January-August 2025)



66% of the 2025 referrals have come from Leicester City Council teams, with 29% of total LCC referrals coming from STAR who have historically been (and continue to be) our most prolific referring service.

Referrals by non-LCC partners (January-August 2025)



44% of referrals came from external partners.

Note that PRISM referrals are administered by HIAP after being completed within the GP office. We receive a formal referral from the PRISM system to a dedicated email inbox. This referral is then transcribed onto the Leicester Energy Action form. This process is in place because PRISM and the NEA systems cannot integrate, and although long-term alternatives are being explored the process functions adequately (note that only referrals from GP offices use PRISM).

There is a lot of scope for higher referral numbers from external partners, particularly from within the NHS and we are working to link key NHS teams with NEA directly.

Number of referrals by broad area

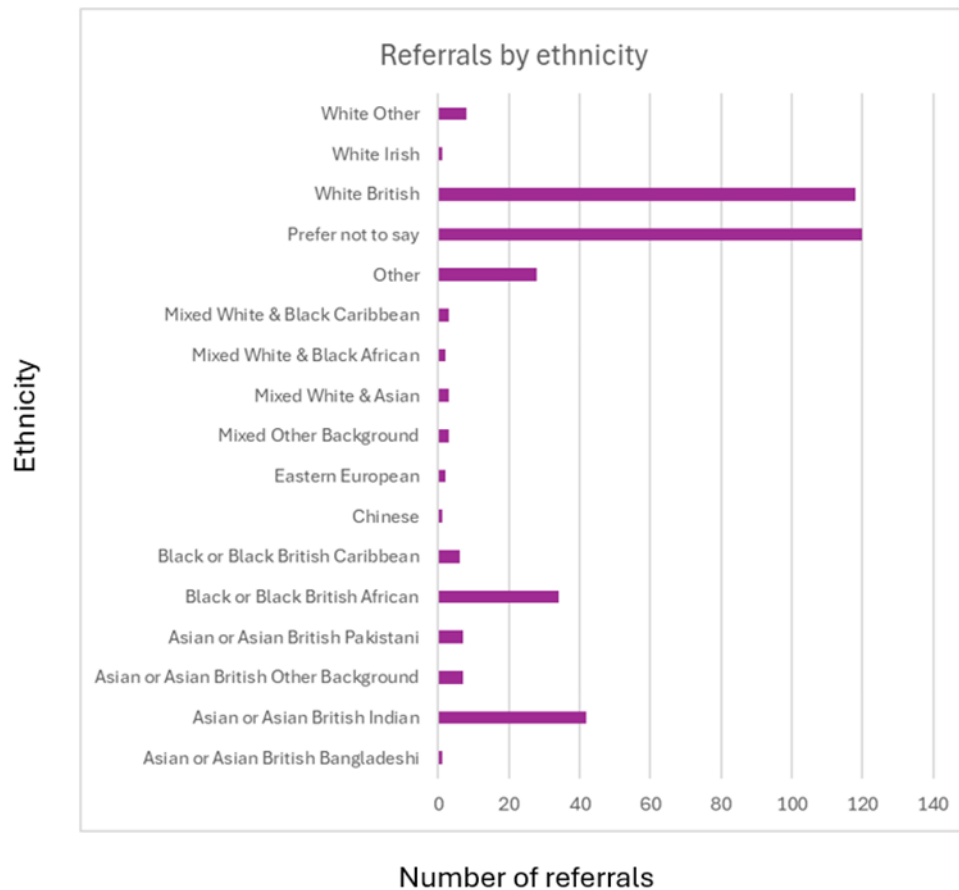
Broad area	No of referrals	Percentage of referrals (%)
Central	75	19.4
East	62	16.1
North	50	13.0
Northwest	51	13.2
South	54	14.0
West	81	21.0
#N/A	13	3.4
Overall Total	386	100.0

Number of referrals by IMD deprivation quintile

IMD Deprivation Quintile 2019	No of referrals	Percentage of referrals (%)
1	236	61.1
2	85	22.0
3	36	9.3
4	11	2.8
5	5	1.3
#N/A	13	3.4
Overall total	386	100.0

We've historically seen a spread of referrals from across all postcodes. This has continued into 2025. We also continue to see a higher level of referrals from more deprived parts of the city.

Referrals broken down by ethnicity (January-August 2025)



NEA continue to use a high-quality translation service ensuring that clients are contacted using their preferred language.

It is noted that the highest category is prefer not to say, and that this limits the usefulness of the data. NEA do work to encourage staff to obtain ethnicity, but it has historically been an area of data collection that returns a high level of these responses.

3.1.3 Moving forward

As we move through winter, we will be running promotional campaigns to reinforce the importance of getting clients connected to support around managing home energy and managing energy costs/debt issues.

Our key actions are:

Raising profile of PRISM access to service within GP surgeries

- Sending patients home to cold homes impedes recovery and worsens existing medical conditions. The PRISM process streamlines referrals from the GP office. Autumn/winter campaign to put the service in the forefront of GP's minds.

Raising awareness of health issues connected to living in a cold home, and promoting support channels within communities through engagement events, and promotion through Community Wellbeing Champions

- Teams will be attending community events, raising awareness of the impacts directly with those affected, and providing access channels to meaningful support, including providing the Leicester Energy Action referral links to staff within interested organisations so that they can refer people in need of help.

Engagement presence within LCC warm spaces

- LCC runs a programme of warm spaces within Libraries during the key winter period. Fuel poverty awareness and access to support channels will be represented and promoted at these warm spaces.

Referral channels within food aid hubs connected to Feeding Leicester and Leicester Food Partnership

- HEAT stations delivered by HIAP within food aid projects (providing hot drinks to people in the cold while simultaneously engaging with them around fuel poverty), and the ability for food hub staff to refer independently.

Support for staff within the NHS offered through Health and Wellbeing channels

- Working with UHL Head of Health and Wellbeing (after being connected through LCC's cost of living meetings) to provide links to support for internal communications. Will once again be representing support offer within hospital canteens during the winter.

Mirror of winter 2024 promotion campaign including social media and electronic boards within Leicester

- We'll be working with our comms team again to get important awareness-raising messages out to the public.

3.1.4 Evaluation

DMU are currently carrying out a formal evaluation of the Leicester Energy Action project. They are in the process of reaching out to stakeholders and clients, supported by both HIAP and DMU. We're anticipating that the evaluation report will be available in early 2026.

NEA have carried out their own internal evaluation which demonstrates some of the impacts and lessons learned from the project (appendix A, B, and C)

3.2 Access: Period Products

In 2024, the Health in All Policies team received £20,000 in funding from Household Support Fund to run 2 pilot schemes. The £20k funding has been split perfectly in half between the two workstreams.

1. Supporting members of the public to access sanitary products in their local libraries
2. Encouraging usage of sustainable period products, such as menstrual cups and period pants

3.2.1 Initial stages

3.2.1.1 Naming the project

In the planning stages, we wanted to ensure that this project would support in breaking down the stigma attached to periods and start to help in providing equitable access to sanitary products. As such, we wanted to avoid attaching the word 'poverty' to the project. The name, 'Access: Period Products', was chosen which clearly outlines what the project entails and seeks to avoid stigma and shame around the scheme.

3.2.1.2 Engaging with key teams and stakeholders

- We met with the Children's Centre staff to learn best practice on how their 2022 pilot scheme was run and how they sustained the provision of free period products across all their sites.
- We worked alongside the libraries team to work out the logistics of running the pilot in library buildings. The team provided us with information on which libraries offered toilet facilities to the public and data on their current footfall. Beaumont Leys does not have toilet facilities accessible by the public and were excluded from the pilot. We developed a document for staff in libraries highlighting the importance of this scheme and our delivery requirements (Briefing document available on request).
- We engaged with Hey Girls, a social enterprise with an aim to eradicate period poverty in the UK, to set up the project. Through Hey Girls, we ordered our stock of menstrual products and obtained posters to display in library toilets.

3.2.2 Project initiation

3.2.2.1 Process documentation

To ensure a smooth launch of the scheme, a process map (available on request) and Gantt chart (available on request) were developed outlining the operational processes.

3.2.2.2 Launch

In December 2024, we received our first order of period products, which we subsequently organised into packs for each participating library. Each pack contained an appropriate amount (suitable for the footfall of the library) of day and night pads, regular and super tampons, baskets to present the products in toilets and 2 posters to be displayed in the toilets (available on request). We delivered the first batch of stock personally to meet the libraries teams and explain the processes of the programme; we were already receiving stock reports by Christmas.

3.2.3 Project established

Once the project was up and running smoothly, the libraries team supported us further by offering a member of staff to support on the operational delivery side of the project. We worked alongside the staff member to improve the programme's efficiency in terms of keeping on top of stock levels, packing and posting out products. This has proved to be effective and ensures the libraries are receiving a top-up of products in a timely fashion.

3.2.3.1 Current uptake from the beginning of the project

The figures below are correct as of end of August 2025. 15537 products have been distributed to libraries in total.

	Total products distributed to libraries	Total products remaining in libraries	Take up of products	% uptake against total sanitary products distributed
Day pads	6302	2500	3802	24.4%
Night pads	4280	2586	1694	10.9%
Regular tampons	2575	1145	1430	9.2%
Super tampons	2380	1052	1328	8.5%

3.2.4 Our activity

Through the Cost-of-Living IMT meeting, we linked up with the Head of Health and Wellbeing within the LPT to support NHS staff accessing sanitary products. Access: Period Products featured in the Health and Wellbeing newsletter which goes out to NHS staff, letting the NHS teams know about the offer within libraries.

We attended an events in August, October and December 2025 aimed at supporting families in temporary accommodation. Families in attendance were made aware of and encouraged to use the support offer in their local libraries.

3.2.5 2026 activity

- Evaluating the pilot scheme to understand the uptake levels, need and effectiveness of the project.
- Launching Access: Sustainable Period Products for residents in Leicester to try out more environmentally friendly sanitary products including period pants and menstrual cups. Products will be obtained through a web-link.

3.3 Feeding Leicester

Feeding Leicester is a collective of individuals and organisations within Leicester that seeks to address food poverty at both local and national level in cooperation with other organisations and as a partner of national charity Feeding Britain.

Leicester City Council has successfully facilitated Feeding Leicester since its inception in 2017.

Historically Feeding Leicester has focused on developing food aid projects from being food banks delivering emergency and free food, into affordable food provisions – development closely supported by Leicester Food Partnership and Leicester’s Food Aid Coordinator.

It has also championed provision of wrap-around services in food projects, including provision of Food Bank Plus, and increasing Healthy Start and Free School Meals uptake. Public Health provide a support function to the group, supporting the independent chair to plan agendas, take forward actions where appropriate, and maintaining the group’s action plan.

HIAP began facilitation of the group in March 2025 and have worked to formalise the steering group and make the group constituted (constitution documentation available on request)

Constituting the group was something that had been being discussed for some time; members wanted to be able to present a formal and unified voice through Feeding Leicester, reflecting work that collectives within other cities had undertaken under the Feeding Britain banner. There was also a drive for the group to be more independent of the local authority, while maintaining key local authority links – something supported by Public Health.

The Feeding Leicester approach to constituting was developed following exploration of how other groups had proceeded and was co-produced with members of the Feeding Leicester steering group.

We are now working to support Feeding Leicester in its key aims:

- Recognising, embracing and supporting the diverse groups and organisations providing affordable and emergency food in Leicester.
- Recognising both the diverse needs of the city, and the diversity of support provision, and seeking to provide a platform for networking, partnerships, information sharing, learning, and where necessary providing a unified voice representing member groups.
- Seeking to celebrate the efforts of local organisations, recognising the contributions being made to support the people of Leicester, and to support any member organisation where appropriate and within the constraints of Feeding Leicester’s abilities.

3.3.1 Moving forward

From a Public Health perspective, we recognise that many of the communities accessing emergency food are the same communities that we want to support with public health

interventions. We will be working with Feeding Leicester to co-produce meaningful solutions to both introducing support channels and generating support uptake within food aid projects, building on the long-standing focus on provision of wrap-around services focusing on debt, welfare and mental health.

We have introduced NHS membership to the steering group and intend that NHS interventions are also introduced to food aid projects with support and promotion from the organisations that have trust and leadership within their communities.

We are in the process of creating and publishing a Feeding Leicester website which will provide a landing point for those seeking connection to the network, support and advice.

3.4 Free School Meals Auto Enrolment

As a further part of our Feeding Leicester facilitation, we are working to introduce auto enrolment to free school meals for eligible students within Leicester schools. Using an approach template provided by the Local Government Association (LGA) and following an action steer from the cost-of-living IMT we began the undertaking in 2025 and have established an operational group, developed an approach plan, and begun implementation of phase one; establishing that the IT processes involved can operate correctly and safely, and establishing the staffing resource necessary.

We are moving quickly toward phase two: presenting a full report including evidenced outcomes and costings to Heads of Service and which can then be taken forward for full approval.

We have recently carried out our first IT process test with promising results. Although the dataset we were able to obtain from finance was limited due to system issues with a third party supplier, our process identified 1157 students who are entitled to and are not currently receiving free school meals.

We have engaged with the Head of Revenues, Benefits and Transactional Finance to support us in obtaining the full data set that we need.

3.5 Cost of Living Group

It was requested that the Cost-of-living IMT meeting be reviewed to establish whether continuation of the meeting was necessary.

As group facilitators we surveyed members and produced a report into the meeting's activities (report available on request).

As a result, we have updated the meeting's terms of reference (available on request) and have provided the following recommendations:

- Cost-of-living meeting to continue but with the revised terms of reference reflecting that we are no longer managing a single incident, rather an ongoing issue. Meeting to be called Cost of Living Group
- Recommendation that we continue with 1-hour-long monthly meetings, particularly as we head into winter.
- HIAP to provide quarterly updates around meeting activity and deliverables

- Current members to decide whether to continue to attend themselves or to introduce a well-placed substitute
- HIAP to invite other suggested representatives in coordination with chair (education/employment hub/Care navigators etc)
- HIAP and CWC work to explore engaging community organisations around cost of living, but separately to the Cost-of-Living group.

4. Financial, legal, equalities, climate emergency and other implications

4.1 Financial Implications

'There are no direct financial implications arising from this report. The report provides an update to the cost-of-living projects being delivered through Public Health within current available resources'. – Georgia Anderson, 19 January 2026

4.2 Legal Implications - There are no direct legal implications arising from this report.

Mannah Begum 16.01.26

Commercial Legal

4.3 Equalities Implications

Under the Equality Act 2010, the council has statutory duties, including the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED). This requires that in carrying out their functions, they have due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation, to advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not, and to foster good relations between those groups. Protected characteristics under the Act are age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation.

Surinder Singh, 19 January 2026

4.4 Climate Emergency Implications

There are strong synergies between the climate and public health agendas. In the context of cost of living, primarily improving the energy efficiency of homes and promoting the use of sustainable period products will help to reduce energy consumption, consumer costs and waste in addition to the co-benefits of improved health and wellbeing.

Community engagement activities as described in the report can generate carbon emissions where they lead to additional travel by Public Health staff, members of the public or staff of partner organisations using private cars, taxis/private hire vehicles or buses. Consideration should be given to minimising these emissions where possible by following the 'travel hierarchy' in the Corporate Travel Policy for staff travel and by running engagement activities in settings close to the target audiences, or at events they are already attending.

Service delivery by the council and partners generally contributes to the council's carbon footprint so any potential impacts could be considered within delivery of related projects, such as encouraging the use of sustainable travel options, using buildings and materials efficiently and adopting updated practices that could help reduce the associated carbon emissions.

Signed: Phil Ball, Sustainability Officer, ext 372246

Dated: 19th January 2026

4.5 Other Implications

None

Signed:

Dated:

5. Background information and other papers:

6. Summary of appendices:

Appendix A, B and C – National Energy Action Internal Evaluation of the Leicester Energy Action Project.